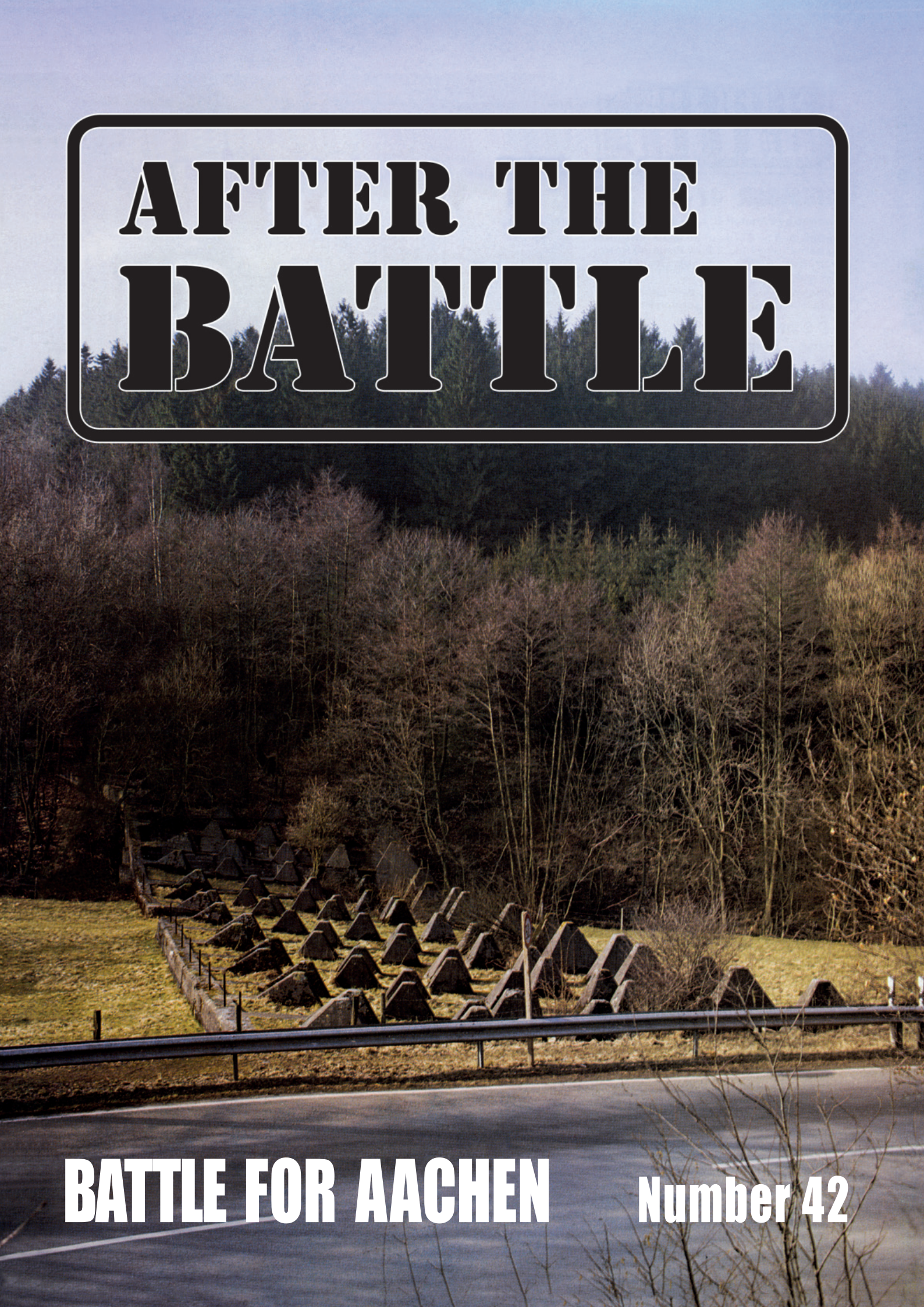


AFTER THE BATTLE



BATTLE FOR AACHEN

Number 42

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Front Cover and Opposite: Comparison in
colour. Historic site of the first penetration
of the Siegfried Line near Roetgen.

Centre Pages: This shell-scarred bunker,
still standing on Rütcher Strasse in
Aachen, was the German nerve-centre
during the battle for the city.

Back Cover: Memorial to one of Belgium's
greatest tragedies — the bombing of
Mortsel on April 5, 1943.

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Aachen based on the account in *The
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THE BATTLE FOR AACHEN





Aachen, the legendary town of Emperor Charlemagne, formerly the Roman spa of Aquisgranum, lies at the point where the German, Belgian and Dutch borders meet, some fifty miles west of the Rhine. The King of the Franks settled in Aachen in 794 AD and, by his conquests, brought together the peoples of what are now the nations of France and Germany to create a vast empire in Europe. Charlemagne died in Aachen on January 28, 814 and was buried in the cathedral where, between the years 936 and 1531, were crowned most of the Kings of Germania. Because of its insecure position near the French border, it began to decline in importance and in 1562 coronations were transferred further east to Frankfurt. These fears were well founded when the city was occupied by French forces in 1794 (the Gallic name for Aachen being Aix-la-Chapelle) and annexed to France in 1801. After the Congress of Vienna in 1814-15, convened by the Allies to redraw the map of Europe after the downfall of Napoleon, it was ceded to Prussia.

Charlemagne's Holy Roman Empire — the First Reich — had lasted well nigh a thousand

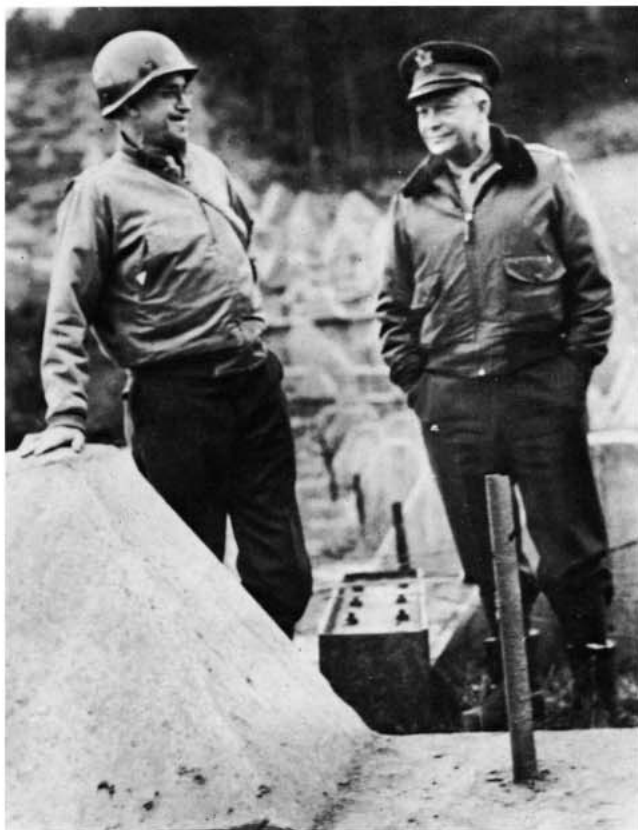
years, and it is hardly necessary to point out the similarity in the claims of longevity made by Adolf Hitler for his Third Reich. Aachen represented a heritage precious to National Socialist ideology although the city was never a Nazi shrine in the sense of Nuremberg or Munich. Nevertheless, being the first major German city to be threatened with capture, Hitler insisted there be a fanatical, house by house defence of this symbol of Nazi faith.

Militarily Aachen had little to recommend it. Lying in a saucer-like depression surrounded by hills it was not a natural fortress although in October 1944 it lay between the twin bands of the Siegfriedstellung — the Siegfried Line or West Wall — which split north and south of the city. To the west lay the relatively thin Scharnhorst Line of outer dragon's teeth, barbed wire and minefields while about five miles to the east, behind the city, lay the thicker, more heavily defended Schill Line which included mutually-sited pillboxes. In general these were built 20 to 30 feet wide, 40 to 50 feet deep and 20 to 25 feet high with at least half the construction underground. The walls and roofs

Above: The first breach of the Siegfried Line (actually the outer Scharnhorst Line) occurred at this spot on the morning of Wednesday, September 13, 1944. Task Force Lovelady (commanded by Lieutenant Colonel William B. Lovelady) formed one of two columns of Combat Command B of the US 3rd Armored Division and at dawn they moved out of Roetgen — a small village astride the Belgian-German frontier. Marching north towards Rott, they encountered the first line of dragon's teeth about half a mile after leaving the village. A crater in the road barred the way until it could be filled in. Note the unfired shell-case demolition charges wired to the tree. (US Army) *Below:* A barrier of a different sort marks the historic location today: just a quiet country backwater — probably passed by without a second glance.

Previous pages: One of the war's most symbolic photographs. Men of the 39th Infantry Regiment, 9th Infantry Division, hitch a ride on a Sherman bulldozer. (US Army).





Left: Two months later General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Allied Expeditionary Force Supreme Commander, paused to be photographed with Lieutenant General Omar N. Bradley, CG US Twelfth Army Group when the 28th Infantry Division HQ was located in Rott. (US Army) **Right:** The same place if not quite the same tooth!

were three to eight feet thick of reinforced concrete. Most had just two firing embrasures, one covering the entrance and the other an arc of 50 degrees, after which the field of fire from the next pillbox in line would take over. Normal complement was seven men per embrasure. Density was about ten pillboxes per mile and most were on forward slopes, usually 200 to 400 yards behind the anti-tank obstacles.

Roads leading through the dragon's teeth — five rows of pointed concrete pyramids increasing in height from two and a half feet in front to nearly five feet at the rear — were provided with a gate and three rows of steel beams embedded diagonally in a concrete foundation. The gate consisted of two 12-inch H-girders welded together and hinged at one end to a concrete pillar. When required these could be swung across the road and bolted to a similar pillar on the opposite side. The second obstacle was also constructed of H-girders which were attached at their base by a flange which hooked over an iron rod. Obviously the road obstacles were the weak link in the chain but as these breaks in the teeth were covered by nearby pillboxes, it was presumably thought that to breach the line via the road would prove difficult under fire.

Begun in 1936 when German troops entered the Rhineland, most of the Siegfried Line had been constructed from 1938 to 1940 during which time a third of Germany's cement production went on the line. More than 3,000 concrete pillboxes, bunkers and observation posts were constructed but its best defence was the propaganda myth of the invincibility of the West Wall. By 1944 it had virtually been neglected for four years although this period has enabled natural vegetation to camouflage many of the constructions. In actual fact the Germans had never intended the fortifications to stop an attacker, only to delay him long enough to bring up mobile reserves. This was a glaring deficiency in 1944 with both troops to man the line and counter-attack effectively being severely limited. Also many of the pillboxes had been constructed for the 3.7 cm anti-tank weapon and the 1934 model machine gun, both of which were front

line weapons in 1940. By 1944 improvements in armour necessitated the use of the 8.8 cm anti-tank gun which could not be fitted into the majority of the casemates. Likewise the machine gun embrasures would not take the later MG 42.

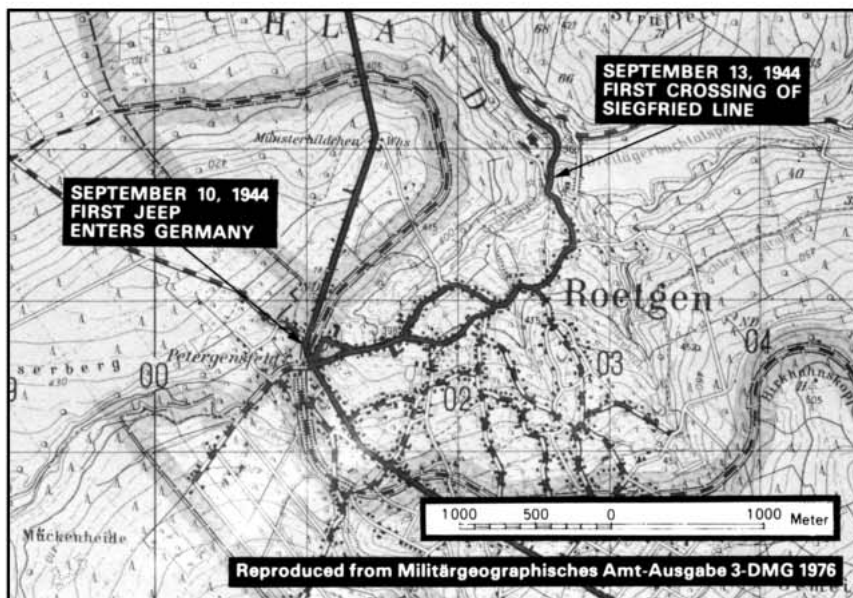
Aachen itself was defended by the 246. Volks Grenadier Division, commanded by Oberst Gerhard Wilck, which had taken over responsibility for the sector from the 116. Panzer Division (the 'Windhund' Division) in late September. North of the city were the 183. Volks Grenadier and 49. Infanterie Divisions while to the south lay the 12. Infanterie Division, the whole comprising the German LXXXI. Korps under the overall command of General der Infanterie Friedrich J. Köchling.

Though the 246. Volks Grenadier Division had engaged in no major action in its own

sector, Oberst Wilck's troops already had been decisively weakened. In the desperate efforts to stem the American XIX Corps breakthrough, General Köchling had rifled his front, including four of Wilck's seven organic infantry battalions. The entire 404. Infanterie Regiment and a battalion each of the 352. and 689. Infanterie Regiments had been attached to neighbouring divisions.

On October 7, the US XIX Corps entered Alsdorf, some six miles or so north of the city in the first move to encircle Aachen and attack it from the rear. From here the units pressed southward towards Würselen.

From a local standpoint, the outlook for preserving Aachen as a citadel of Nazi ideology was bleak indeed. Yet General Köchling's superiors had not let him down completely. Their most immediate step was to



The border at Roetgen twists and turns leaving the railway line Belgian territory.



Above: The hasty job of back-filling the crater blown by the Germans in the road surface eventually made it impassable for armour. US engineers therefore blasted a gap through the line about a hundred yards away near the river. (US Army) *Below:* The breach in the teeth can still be seen. *Right:* Heavy metal barbed wire supports still show the effects of shellfire.



Where the Höckerlinie (as the Germans call the lines of dragon's teeth) cross the water they are mounted on a reinforced concrete 'bridge'. The openings beneath are too narrow to be used by tanks.



In the trees on the hillside, several bunkers covered the road. The Germans in eight of them fled as the tank force approached. These all show the effects of accurate shelling and subsequent demolition charges.

try again to assemble an effective counter-attacking force from diverse elements to strike at Alsdorf in hopes of thwarting the encirclement of Aachen. The main component of this force was to be Schnelle (Mobile) Regiment von Fritzschen, which comprised three battalions of bicycle-mounted infantry and engineers. Major support was to come from the 108. Panzer Brigade and a total of twenty-two assault guns from various units.

Any genuine hope of denying Aachen for an extended time lay not with this small force but with a promise from the Commander in Chief West, Gerd von Rundstedt, to commit his most important theatre reserves. These were the 3. Panzer Grenadier and 116. Panzer Divisions. Attaching these to headquarters of the I. SS-Panzer Corps (General der Waffen-SS Georg Keppler), Rundstedt directed major operations intended to restore the situation about Aachen. Since leaving the city in September, the 116. Panzer Division had been built up to about 11,500 men and its tank regiment restored, but of 151 authorised PzKpfw IV and Panther tanks only 41 were on hand. Although the 3. Panzer Grenadier Division was little more than a motorised infantry division, it numbered about 12,000 men and had 31 75mm anti-tank guns and 38 artillery pieces.

Throughout the days of October 5, 6, and 7 General Köchling waited in vain for the appearance of these reserves. They were on the way, but disruptions from Allied air attacks on the rail network had imposed serious delays and General Köchling feared a catastrophe at Aachen before the reserves could be committed.

From the American viewpoint, the timing of the operation to encircle and reduce Aachen depended upon the progress of the West Wall penetration north of the city. As soon as the XIX Corps drive to the vicinity of Würselen gave evidence of success, Major General Lawton Collins' VII Corps in the south was to attack north from a jump-off base at Eilendorf, east of Aachen, seize Verlautenheide, a strongpoint in the second band of the West Wall, and meet the XIX Corps near Würselen. With Aachen isolated, a part of the VII Corps might then be able to reduce the city at leisure while the XIX Corps and the rest of the VII Corps drove east and north-east to the Roer River.

Events at Alsdorf on October 7 convinced commanders on the American side that the time to force the issue at Aachen was at hand. To the commander of the 30th Division, Major General Leland S. Hobbs, the job of advancing three more miles from Alsdorf south to the corps boundary and the link-up objective of Würselen appeared at worst no more than a two-day assignment. He therefore urged that the VII Corps waste no time in



Above: T/5 Charles D. Hiller drives the first 'peep' (as the jeep was then called if carrying personnel) across the German frontier on September 10. The passenger is a Belgian Henri Souvee. (US Army) **Below:** The original Roetgen railway station was pulled down in the mid-1950s. Careful examination of the map on page 3 will show that German territory lies either side of the Belgian railway tracks. We were told that the American driver has since returned to the spot.



Left: The existence of this picture seems to indicate that the one at the top of the page was a staged photo as the same jeep is now seen travelling in the opposite direction back into



Belgium towards Raeren. (US Army) Right: The border post on the left was closed in 1968 and moved further west — a local policeman explained the complicated route of the border.

launching their part of the encirclement manoeuvre.

The 30th Division alone bore responsibility for the XIX Corps role in the encirclement, while Major General Clarence R. Huebner's 1st Division was the logical choice to fulfil the task of the VII Corps in the south. When Lieutenant General Courtney H. Hodges, US First Army Commander, in the late afternoon of October 7 endorsed the recommendation that VII Corps begin to attack, the 1st Division needed little time for preparation. General Huebner announced a night attack to commence before dawn the next day, October 8.

The Southern Advance

Perhaps because the 1st Division had faced the enemy at Aachen for several weeks, the G-2, Lieutenant Colonel Robert F. Evans, had a fairly accurate impression of enemy strength and dispositions. Counting support and service troops, his figure of 12,000 Germans in Aachen and the immediate vicinity was fairly accurate, even though attempts to halt the American penetration north of Aachen had sapped considerable strength from the 246. Volks Grenadier Division. Identifying this division and its neighbours correctly, Colonel Evans also ascertained most of the combat attachments to the Volks Grenadiers. These included a weak infantry battalion that formerly had belonged to the 275. Infanterie Division, a battalion of Luftwaffe ground troops, a machine gun fortress battalion, and a Landesschützen battalion. Colonel Evans also correctly identified the local or fortress commander of Aachen as Oberstleutnant Maximilian Leyherr.

In preparing for the attack northward, the commander of the 18th Infantry Regiment, which had been assigned the task of capturing Verlautenheide, Colonel George A. Smith, Jr., turned to the lessons he and his men had learned in their first encounter with the West Wall in September. Special pillbox assault teams were organised and equipped with flame throwers, Bangalore torpedoes, beehives, and pole and satchel demolition charges. A battery of 155mm guns and a company of tank destroyers, both self-propelled, were prepared to pour direct fire against the pillboxes on the slope about Verlautenheide. An air-ground liaison officer was to accompany each infantry battalion. Preceding the attack, eleven artillery battalions and a company of 4.2-inch chemical mortars were to fire an hour-long preparation. The division's other two regiments and the 1106th Engineers were to feign attack in their sectors. After daylight, a company of medium tanks was to join the infantry in the village.

Because the American attacks to encircle Aachen were confined to a combined front of not more than five miles, German shelling was concentrated with deadly effect. However, being pressed on two fronts, Oberst Wilck had difficulty in releasing troops for mounting counter-attacks. Within forty-eight hours the 18th Infantry had reached their objective and on October 10 reached Haaren, a suburb of Aachen, cutting one of the two major supply routes left to the Germans within the city.

Although the 30th Division in the north had encountered unexpected resistance, to General Huebner, a final sealing of the ring about Aachen must nevertheless have appeared little more than a formality. On October 10 he ordered delivery of an ultimatum to the commander of the enemy garrison in Aachen. If the commander failed to capitulate unconditionally within twenty-four hours, the ultimatum warned, the Americans would pulverize the city with artillery and bombs, then seize the rubble by ground assault. Already troops of the 26th Infantry Regiment (1st Division) were jockeying for position in preparation for starting the attacks against the jungle of

factories lying between Haaren and the city proper.

The same day the first German reserves, the 3. Panzer Grenadiers and 116. Panzer Division, began reaching the city and von Rundstedt authorised their commitment under the I. SS-Panzer Korps although Army Group G Commander, Generalfeldmarschall Walter Model, saw no hope of a major counter-attack before October 12.

In the meantime, as these German reserves massed, the ultimatum to the commander of Aachen expired, and the 26th Infantry began to attack the city while the 18th Infantry continued to hold thinly stretched positions at Verlautenheide and Haaren. With the German defence situation deteriorating, a hasty yet strong counter-attack was mounted on American positions around Verlautenheide on October 15, the assault being led by ten to fifteen Tiger tanks and captured Shermans, one still bearing the markings of an American armoured division. However the arrival of the

P-47s of the 48th Fighter Group just before 2.00 p.m., coupled with American artillery fire, halted the attack and no real penetration developed. German attempts to break through continued the following day but severe losses prompted the abandonment of the 3. Panzer Grenadier attack.

Attack from the North

In the meantime, further north, the 30th Division had been executing the other arm of the pincer. Having turned southward from the West Wall penetration in high spirits on October 7, the 30th Division commander, General Hobbs, had hoped by nightfall the next day to be sitting tight on his final objective, awaiting the arrival of 1st Division troops. So optimistic was General Hobbs that early on October 8 he told his corps commander that 'the job is finished as far as this division is concerned. . . .'



White flag of surrender on the German Reichsbahn building at Roetgen. It was in a public building in the town (most probably the Rathaus, since demolished and rebuilt) that the trial of Eddie Slovik was held — see After the Battle No. 32.



The facade to the Grenzhof restaurant has seen some changes yet the flagpole bracket still remains for future use.



Above: A Sherman and M-10 tank destroyer on the Route 258 outside Roetgen. This picture was taken on September 10 — just a month was to elapse before the battle of Aachen commenced with the occupation of Alsdorf by the 30th Infantry Division. (US Army) Below: The trees were felled in the 1960s.

As General Hobbs was to learn to his chagrin, he had allowed the easy success of the day before, when his troops had plunged a third of the distance to the link-up objective of Würselen, to colour his thinking. In the nine days that followed, the three-mile distance remaining before the job actually was completed was to become a route bathed in blood and frustration.

Unlike the 18th Infantry, the 30th Division had no problem at first with enemy pillboxes for the bulk of the troops were already through the West Wall. Only the right wing regiment in the west encountered pillboxes at the start, but it was hoped that these might be rolled up from a flank. Yet this did not mean that the route of advance was clear of obstacles. This region to the north and north-east of Aachen is highly urbanised coal-mining country, honeycombed with slag piles, mine shafts, and villages that might be adapted readily to defence.

Even as the 30th Division prepared to renew the southward drive, the 108. Panzer Brigade and the Regiment von Fritzschen were preparing to attack the division's eastern flank. At 9.30 a.m. on October 8 the Germans struck west of Mariadorf with the task of trying to retake Alsdorf. Although the Regiment von Fritzschen managed to get its tanks into the town, the 743rd Tank Battalion knocked out several panzers and blunted the attack.

The American advance resumed the next morning but with the encirclement plan now abundantly clear, the Germans fought hard to contain the drive on Würselen. Bardenburg was occupied by late afternoon yet it was not

until October 11 that the Americans met the 108. Panzer Brigade. In helping his company to stem the counter-attack, Staff Sergeant Jack Pendleton was killed, later being awarded the Medal of Honor for his exploit of deliberately drawing the fire of an enemy machine gun. By now clearer weather enabled American fighter bombers to operate for the first time in three days and by evening the route to Würselen was clear.

By now the Germans had been reinforced by the 60. Panzer Grenadier Regiment and Kampfgruppe Diefenthal — a hybrid collection of survivors of two defunct SS panzer divisions. Together with the 108. Panzer Brigade an emergency counter-attack was launched early the following day to try to hold open and widen the corridor into Aachen. The battles continued throughout October 11 and into the night, it only being the overwhelming American artillery and fighter-bomber support which held the line and enabled the infantry to contain every German thrust.

Where the closing of the gap had seemed a relatively easy task a few days before, now, after suffering over 2,000 casualties, the 30th Division's General Hobbs pleaded for assistance. All that could be spared without weakening the West Wall bridgehead was a battalion of the 2nd Armoured Division's medium tanks, and the 116th Infantry Regiment of the 29th Division which was freed

to help by shuffling around other units. This done, orders were given for the 30th to resume the attack next morning. A clever ruse diverted much of the German shelling to the east which freed the 119th Infantry to press on down to the west of Würselen. At 3.44 p.m. on October 16 the 1st Division's chief of staff had telephoned to say that men of his 18th Infantry on Ravels Hill could see American troops along the south-western fringe of Würselen. They were men of Lieutenant Colonel William C. Cox's 2nd Battalion who had reached their objective, Hill 194. They were less than a thousand yards from the closest foxholes of the 18th Infantry.

Led by Staff Sergeant Frank A. Karwell, a patrol left Hill 194 to make the actual physical contact, so long awaited. En route, German fire cut down Sergeant Karwell and prevented the main body of the patrol from crossing the Aachen-Würselen highway. Yet the two scouts, Privates Edward Krauss and Evan Whitis, continued. As they started up Ravels Hill, they made out figures in American uniforms.

'We're from K Company', the men on the hill shouted. 'Come on up'.

'We're from F Company', Whitis and Krauss replied. 'Come on down'.

The men from the 1st Division talked faster and more persuasively. Whitis and Krauss went up and at 4.15 p.m. on October 16 they closed the Aachen Gap.





Assault on the City

When the Aachen encirclement manoeuvre began on October 8 the city that was the ultimate objective was already a scarred shell. Less than 20,000 of Aachen's pre-war population of some 165,000 had clung to their homes through the various vicissitudes of Nazi evacuation orders. As early as two months before D-Day in Normandy the RAF had bombed the city and in late May British aircraft had struck several times over three days at what was left. By October 8 much of Aachen already was a sterile sea of rubble.

Few in Aachen could have doubted that the end was near when on October 10 three Americans — 1st Lieutenant Cedric A. Lafley, 1st Lieutenant William Boehme, and Pfc. Ken Kading — approached along the Trierer Strasse bearing a white flag and a surrender ultimatum. As most were to learn from listening to Radio Luxembourg or to American public address systems, or else from examining leaflets which US artillery shot into the ruins, the Americans were granting the commander of the Aachen military garrison twenty-four hours in which to surrender.

The city of Aachen [the ultimatum stated in part] is now completely surrounded by American forces. . . . If the city is not promptly and completely surrendered unconditionally, the American Army Ground and Air Forces will proceed ruthlessly with air and artillery bombardment to reduce it to submission.

The military commander of Aachen at the time of delivery of the surrender ultimatum was Oberstleutnant Maximilian Leyherr, one of the 246. Division's regimental commanders, and he dutifully rejected the ultimatum in accord with Hitler's 'last stand' orders.

Two days later Oberstleutnant Leyherr was relieved in deference to the arrival of his division commander, Oberst Wilck (246. Division). Oberst Wilck established his

1st Lieutenant William Boehme, the interpreter (left) with the flag-bearer, Pfc. Kenneth Kading, and 1st Lieutenant Cedric Lafley who carried the surrender ultimatum from Lieutenant General Hodges, First Army Commander.

Pfc. Lawrence J. Kern (right) and unidentified men of Company L, 26th Infantry Regiment, on Jülicher Strasse at the edge of the city in Haaren. (US Army)



The Kinon-Spiegel glass factory was rebuilt in 1971-72.





Left: Broken glass caused havoc with the tyres of vehicles evacuating the wounded. Here, Company C engineers (1st Division) clear away debris further down Jülicher Strasse



outside Nos. 303 and 305 on October 13 while the battle for the city was raging. (US Army) Right: The spang-marked building has been neatly repaired – Liebigstrasse is the turning beyond.

headquarters in the Palast-Hotel Quellenhof in Farwick Park in the northern part of the city.

For capturing Aachen itself the attack force available to General Huebner, the American commander, was numerically inferior to that which Oberst Wilck had for defence. Forced to dispose the bulk of the 1st Division elsewhere on an elongated front, and to husband one infantry battalion as a reserve, General Huebner had but two battalions of the 26th Infantry free to assault the city. Within the inner defences of Aachen, Oberst Wilck had roughly 5,000 men. Most were from Wilck's own 246. Division, though some represented nondescript fortress units and 125 were Aachen policemen thrust into the line under command of the chief of police. Some eighty policemen from Cologne were later to slip through the gap at Würselen to join the fight.

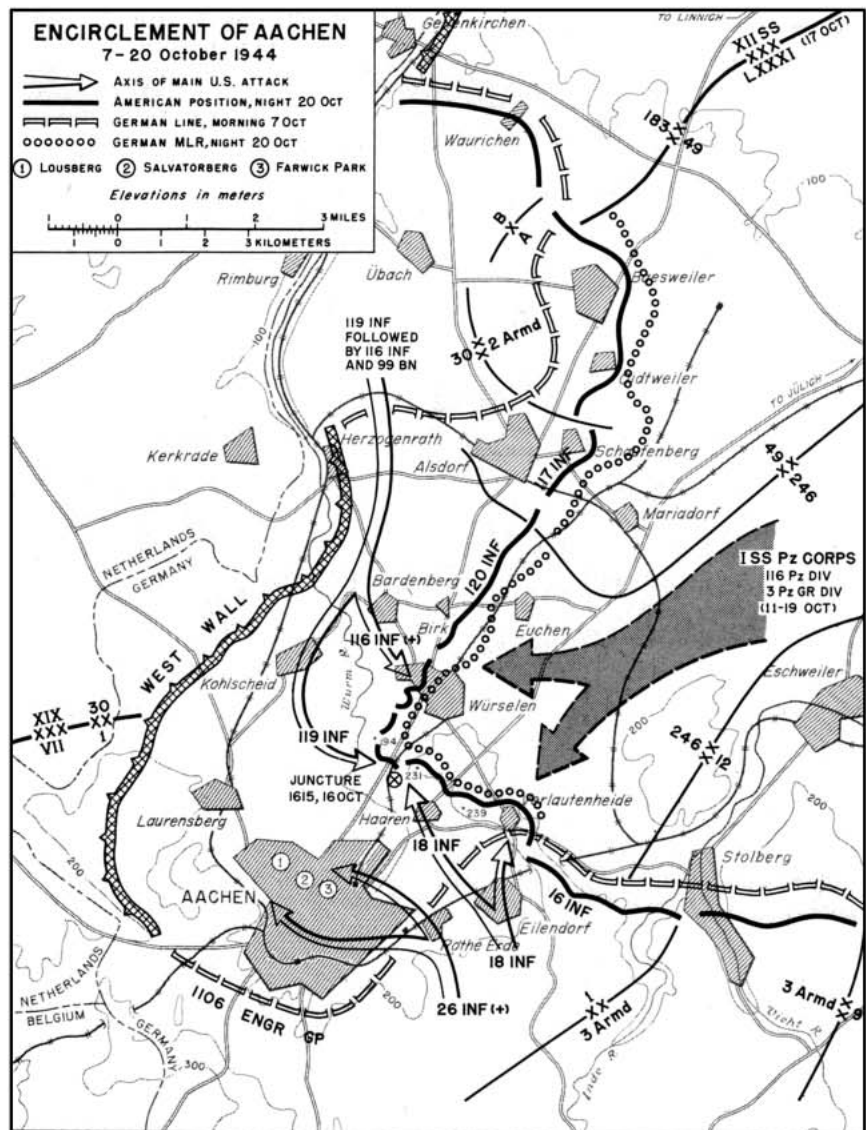
As Oberst Wilck must have known, the great American superiority was in armour, artillery, and aircraft. Although the Luftwaffe had begun to display recognition that a war still went on in the West, the German planes usually appeared only in small groups and at night when Allied aircraft were not around. As for armour, Oberst Wilck had no more than about five PzKpfw IVs. As long as communications remained constant, Oberst Wilck might solicit substantial artillery support from outside the city but at hand within the inner defenses were only 19 105mm howitzers, 8 75mm pieces, and 6 150mm guns.

On the American side, General Huebner naturally desired quick reduction of Aachen, yet he saw no point in a Pyrrhic victory. Even had he desired a bold thrust, he could permit only a cautious advance because the gap at Würselen was still open and from Stolberg to Ravels Hill his defenses were dangerously thin. He told the 26th Infantry commander, Colonel John F. R. Seitz, not to get inextricably involved in Aachen. The regiment would have to attack, as the 26th Infantry S-3 put it, 'with one eye cocked over their right shoulder'. Yet in striking from the east, i.e. the back door, the regiment held a distinct advantage.

During the two days when the 18th Infantry was driving north through Verlautenheide to Ravels Hill, the 26th Infantry had been eating away at Aachen's eastern suburb of Rothe Erde and otherwise getting into position for assault on the city. To reduce his frontage, Colonel Seitz put a provisional company into the line on his left wing to face Aachen from the south-east. This company tied in with defenses of the 1106th Engineers south of the city. Although the engineers were to pivot

their right wing from time to time in order to maintain contact as the 26th Infantry advanced into the city, they were not equipped to make a full-blooded attack.

Colonel Seitz pressed his 2nd Battalion under Lieutenant Colonel Derrill M. Daniel up to the Aachen-Cologne railway tracks at Rothe Erde and prepared to send his men



The map from the official US Army history 'The Siegfried Line Campaign' clearly shows how Aachen was entered by the back door after the Scharnhorst Line was pierced north and south of the city.

westward through the heart of Aachen. His remaining battalion, the 3rd under Lieutenant Colonel John T. Corley, moved to jump-off positions between Rothe Erde and Haaren. From there Colonel Corley was to strike north-westward against the factories lying between Aachen proper and Haaren and thence westward to seize three hills that dominate Aachen from the city's northern fringes.

The bulk of this hill mass, developed as a big public park, is known as the Lousberg. It rises to a height of 862 feet and casts a shadow over almost the entire city. The Americans were to know it as Observatory Hill after an observation tower on the crest. A lower knob on the south-eastern slopes of the hill, crowned by a cathedral, is known as the Salvatorberg. Farther down the south-eastern slopes in Farwick Park, near the corner of Rolandstrasse and Mohnheimsallee, stood the elaborate Palast-Hotel Quellenhof and a municipal Kurhaus where, in happier days, patrons took the medicinal waters.

Soon after the surrender deadline expired on October 11, four groups of IX Tactical Air Command P-38s and P-47s (about 300 aircraft) opened the assault. The planes loosed more than 62 tons of bombs on targets primarily on the perimeter of the city selected by the infantry and marked with red smoke by the artillery. In a deafening cacophony, twelve battalions of VII Corps and 1st Division artillery took up the bombardment. Division artillery fired some 2,500 rounds into the city while corps artillery contributed 2,371 rounds, a total of 169 tons. Though both air and ground observers deemed the bombing and shelling accurate, patrols that tested the defences in early evening found no appreciable lessening of German fire.

After daylight the next morning, October 12, three groups of fighter-bombers returned to drop 99 tons of bombs. Thereafter Aachen became a secondary target. Except on the third day (October 13) when two groups dropped 11½ tons of bombs, the air forces made no other sizeable contribution to the assault. Artillery likewise resumed the attack on October 12. Corps and division artillery expended 5,000 rounds on that date.

Even as the air and artillery bombardment continued on October 12, Colonel Corley's 3rd Battalion, 26th Infantry, attacked to clear the factories lying between Aachen and Haaren, a preliminary to the main attack set to begin the next day. Despite the urban nature of the battlefield, the battalion methodically cleared the objective and by nightfall was poised for the main assault. Early on October 13 Colonel Corley's battalion was to push north-west



Above: Just south of the railway track at Rothe Erde lies the suburb of Forst. This high ground gave Company A of the 634th Tank Destroyer Battalion a vantage point to shell points of resistance with their 3-inch guns. (US Army) **Below:** No location is given in the 1944 caption and only with difficulty did we manage to trace it. The photographer took the picture from an upstairs window of No. 25 Schönrathstrasse. We had to make do with a ground level shot. The sole remaining building on the right is No. 21 Altstrasse.



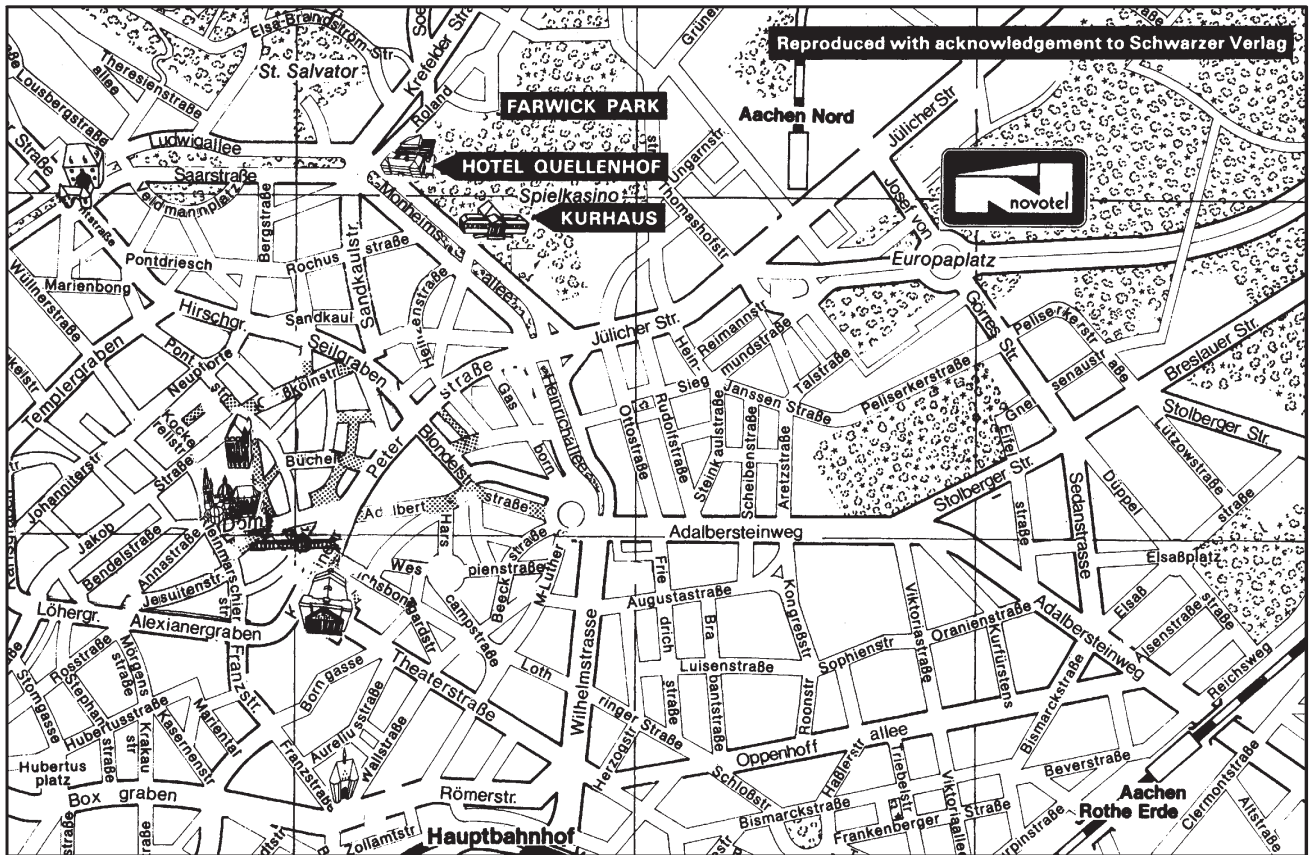
Jülicher Strasse, Adalbertsteinweg and Oppenhoffallee are the three main thoroughfares running from the west into the centre. These were the main axes of the advance with Colonel Corley's 3rd Battalion on the right flank heading north-west for the high ground of Farwick Park and Lousberg. At the same time the 2nd Battalion under Colonel Daniel advanced virtually



due west between the Adalbertsteinweg and the railway line on a front of 2,000 yards. The maze of small streets had to be taken building by building, almost room by room. **Above:** Adalbertsteinweg opposite Kaiserstrasse which was renamed Goerdelerstrasse in 1973 after the politician Carl Friedrich Goerdeler, killed by the Nazis in 1945.



An unnamed infantryman of the 2nd Battalion passes the burning chemist's shop at No. 5 Elsasstrasse. (US Army)



The shop is still smouldering as an anti-tank gun crew unlimber on the corner of Adalbertsteinweg. (US Army)



towards Observatory Hill while Colonel Daniel's 2nd Battalion began a painstaking sweep through the heart of the city.

In moving through the centre of Aachen, Colonel Daniel's men not only had to plough through the maze of rubble and damaged buildings in their path but also to maintain contact with Colonel Corley's main effort against the northern hills. His left (south) flank resting on the railway, Colonel Daniel had an attack frontage of about 2,000 yards, no minor assignment in view of the density of

Pfc. Ragnel Lundgren of Jamestown, New York, communicates with his unit headquarters. Although this picture also has the feeling of being specially posed, it makes a fine comparison on the corner of Adalbertsteinweg and Oranienstrasse.

the buildings. Of necessity, his advance would be slow and plodding.

The fighting in Colonel Daniel's sector quickly fell into a pattern. Dividing his resources into small assault teams, Colonel Daniel sent a tank or tank destroyer with each infantry platoon. These would keep each building under fire until the riflemen moved

in to assault; thereupon, the armour would shift fire to the next house. Augmented by the battalion's light and heavy machine guns firing up the streets, this shelling usually drove the Germans into the cellars where the infantry stormed them behind a barrage of hand grenades. Whenever the enemy proved particularly tenacious, the riflemen used the



other weapons at their disposal, including demolitions and flame throwers employed by two-man teams attached to each company headquarters. The men did not wait for actual targets to appear; each building, they assumed, was a nest of resistance until proved otherwise. Light artillery and mortar fire swept forward block by block several streets ahead of the infantry while heavier artillery pounded German communications farther to the rear.

To maintain contact between units, each day Colonel Daniel designated a series of check-points based on street intersections and more prominent buildings. No unit advanced beyond a check-point until having established contact with the adjacent unit. Each rifle company was assigned a specific zone of advance; company commanders in turn generally designated a street to each platoon.

After a few bitter experiences in which Germans, bypassed in cellars or storm sewers, emerged in the rear of the attackers, the riflemen soon learned that speed was less important than pertinacity. The sewers posed a special problem; each manhole had to be located and thoroughly blocked and covered. Another special problem stemmed from glass and other litter that punctured tyres on wheeled vehicles used for evacuating wounded. Medics found a solution in using tracked M-29 Weasels.

In the other half of the attack, Colonel Corley's battalion, which was driving west toward the high ground marked by the Lousberg (Observatory Hill), the Salvatorberg, and Farwick Park, found the route blocked on the first day, October 13, by stoutly defended blocks of flats. The men measured their gains in buildings, floors, and even rooms and someone said the fight was 'from attic to attic and from sewer to sewer'.

As riflemen of Company K advanced down Jülicher Strasse, 20mm cannon fire from a side street drove them back. Two accompanying tanks remained exposed to lethal panzerfausts. The Germans quickly knocked them out and one went up in flames. Disregarding enemy fire, a Company K squad leader, Sergeant Alvin R. Wise, rushed to the other tank to evacuate the wounded crew. The tank, he decided, might be recovered. Climbing inside, he began to spray adjacent German-held buildings with fire from the tank's machine guns. Under this covering fire, two privates from Sergeant Wise's squad joined him in the tank. Though none of the three ever had been inside a tank before they somehow managed to start the engine, turn the tank around, and drive it down the street to safety.

Having discovered on the first day that some buildings and air raid shelters could withstand the fire of tanks and tank destroyers, Colonel Corley called for a self-propelled 155mm gun. Early the next morning the big weapon proved its worth in the first



These photographs on the other hand are good action shots although precise locations are not given in the captions. This one just states: 'An American 57mm anti-tank gun crew fire upon a tower in the background where Nazis have created a strong point in the city of Aachen, Germany'. Nevertheless it was a picture that just had to be included and we finally established that it had been taken beside the Justizvollzugsanstalt — the court-house — on Adalbertsteinweg. The gun is firing towards St Adalbert's church. (US Army)



The machine-gunners are firing in the same direction from the westernmost court-house gateway.



Death stalks Pastorplatz. The Sherman stands in Luisenstrasse although its barrel points towards Charlottenstrasse. (US Army)

test when with one shot it practically demolished one of the sturdy buildings. Impressed, the regimental commander, Colonel Seitz, sent one of the weapons to support his other battalion as well.

By nightfall of the first day Colonel Corley's battalion had reached the base of the high ground. Early on October 14, when two companies combined to overrun a strongpoint at St Elizabeth's Church, the momentum of the attack carried one of the companies a few hundred yards past the church and into Farwick Park, the big park surrounding the Kurhaus and Palast-Hotel Quellenhof. Yet this company's hold was tenuous at best, for the rest of the battalion still was occupied in the buildings on the approaches to the park. The Germans still held the buildings in Farwick Park: the hotel, the Kurhaus, the Orangerie greenhouse, and several gardening buildings.

As early as October 13, the drive toward the high ground had prompted Oberst Wilck to appeal for reinforcements. By nightfall, in response to this plea, the Germans on Observatory Hill were strengthened with about 150 men who were all that remained of Wilck's own 404. Regiment. Although Kampfgruppe Diefenthal's SS-Bataillon Rink also tried to reach the hill, that battalion was sidetracked by one of the 30th Division's attacks near Würselen. Oberst Wilck radioed

his corps commander, in what was apparently a gross exaggeration, that American tanks had surrounded his command post in Hotel Quellenhof.

In response to this startling message, the corps commander, General Köchling, tried throughout October 14 to disengage SS-Bataillon Rink, reinforce the SS troops with a convoy of assault guns, and send them to Wilck's relief. Eight assault guns made it by early evening; SS-Bataillon Rink did not arrive until the next day.

For his part, Colonel Corley renewed the attack in Farwick Park early on October 15 with the assistance of close support from attached chemical mortars. By midday his men had wrested the gardening buildings, the greenhouse, and the Kurhaus from the Germans, but the enemy would not budge from behind the sturdy walls of Hotel Quellenhof. Colonel Corley was sending forward his 155mm gun to blast the building and readying his reserve company to flank it when the Germans launched a sharp counter-attack.

In strength about that of a battalion, the enemy force apparently included remnants of both the 404. Regiment and SS-Bataillon Rink. For about an hour the American

company on the north edge of Farwick Park parried the blows, but at last the company had to fall back. Supported by assault guns, the Germans swept southward to hit the next company. Although forced to relinquish the Kurhaus, the company held fast in the park surrounding it. Refusing to leave his post, a mortar observer called down shellfire on his own position. By 5.00 p.m. the sting was gone from the German drive and Colonel Corley could report that his men not only would hold their own but soon would resume the advance.

The battalion did hold, but in the light of the bludgeoning blows which the 3. Panzer Grenadier Division had begun to direct against the 16th Infantry's linear defence near Eilendorf, General Huebner directed postponement of further offensive moves in Aachen. He told Colonel Seitz to hold in place until the situation along the division's east wing could be stabilised.

Left: Some time later Pfc. Hoyle E. Lougherty stands on the same corner. The slogan, a standard German wartime message, on the wall of No. 3 states: 'Take care, the enemy may be listening'. (US Army) Right: Seeking out the man in the homburg thirty-eight years later.





The Sherman moves off down Luisenstrasse in support of Company M, 26th Infantry, as they head in towards the town centre.





The advance continues down the parallel Augustastrasse — infantrymen crouch in doorways as the armour prepares the way.

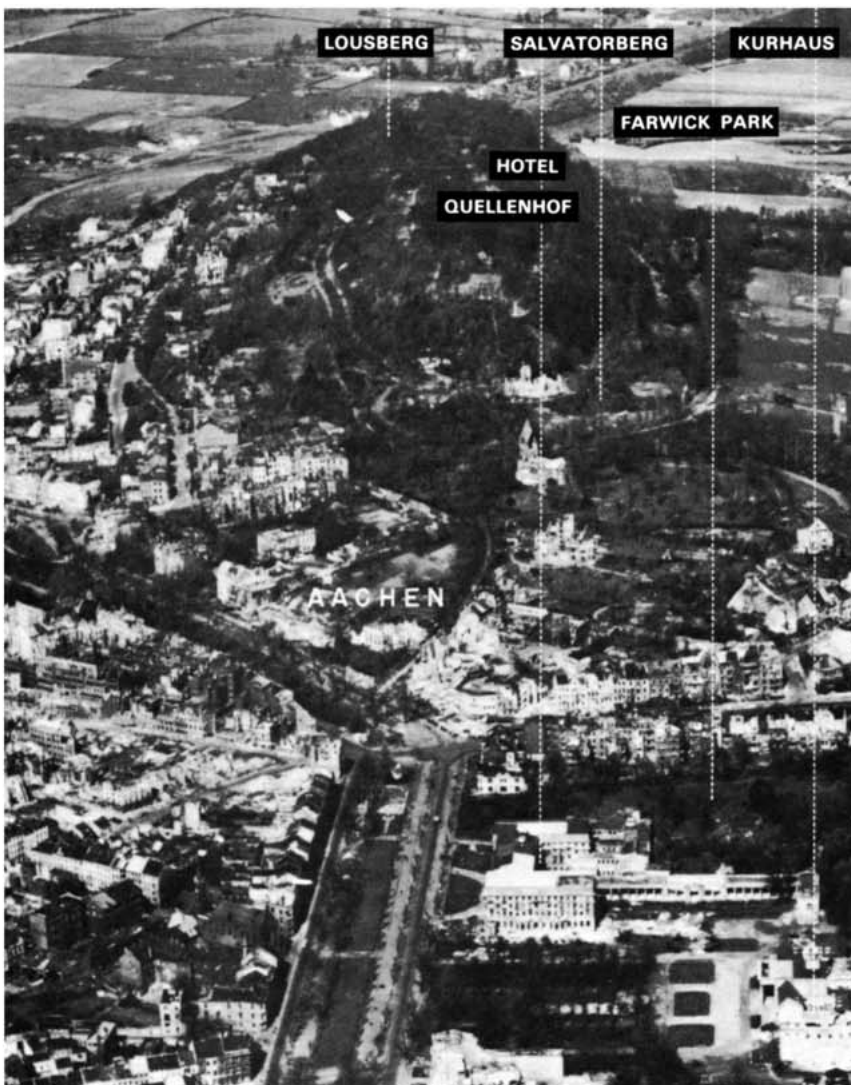


Company G use Oppenhoffallee, running parallel to the south of Luisenstrasse. Dreifaltigkeits-Kirche spire in the distance.



Reaching the junction with Zollernstrasse the men move cautiously towards the heart of Aachen. (US Army)





Left: While Colonel Daniel's men were battling through to the city centre, the 3rd Battalion of Colonel Corley was aiming for Salvatorberg and Lousberg to the north. The high ground gave a natural defence advantage to the Germans. (US Army) *Above:* Armour moves in on Krefelder Strasse — the main road between the Lousberg and Salvatorberg. The original caption names the observer in the Sherman as Corporal Eugene McKay of Calumet City, Illinois. (US Army) *Opposite top:* We discovered that the Sherman had been parked just at the beginning of the Kardinalstrasse.

Only for a day was it necessary for the two battalions in Aachen to desist from attack. By October 16 the 16th Infantry had repulsed the best the 3. Panzer Grenadier Division could offer. The long-awaited juncture between 1st and 30th Division troops to close the Würselen gap in the Aachen encirclement further allayed General Huebner's concern. Yet the General still held the 26th Infantry in check for another day while awaiting arrival of reinforcements promised for the final blow against Aachen by the corps commander, General Collins.

From the time Privates Whitis and Krauss first closed the Aachen Gap late on October 16, even the most fanatic of the German defenders inside the city must have sensed the inevitable end. On that day Oberst Wilck had a total of 4,392 'combat effectives,' plus 11 surgeons and 34 medics.

As a result of a decision by the American corps commander, American strength in Aachen increased in a ratio greater than the decrease in German strength. General Collins had decided to reinforce the two battalions of tanks and armoured infantry of the 3rd Armored Division that had been alerted to counter-attack any penetration near Eilendorf but had not been needed there. Called Task Force Hogan, these two units were to join the fight on the north flank of Colonel Corley's battalion to launch a right hook against the Lousberg. The armour also was to occupy the village of Laurensberg, two miles north-west of Aachen, key to that part of the West Wall



Above: Private William Zukerbrow from Brooklyn, New York, shelters behind a German 47mm PaK in this picture taken on October 19 — the day the high ground was captured. (US Army) Having first seen this picture many years ago, it was one we had long wanted to pinpoint. The background is indistinct

and there is no clue in the official caption other than 'Aachen'. We came across this building (*below left*) while tramping the streets and were 'admiring' its pock-marked facade when suddenly we turned round . . . and there was the comparison (*below*).



which remnants of the 49. Infanterie Division still held north and north-west of the city. As an additional reinforcement, General Collins, through the auspices of the First Army, attached to the 1st Division a battalion of the 110th Infantry, brought north from Camp d'Elsenborn in the V Corps sector where the 28th Division was holding a relatively inactive front. General Huebner was to use this battalion only in a defensive role to cover a growing gap between Colonel Daniel's battalion of the 26th Infantry in Aachen and the 1106th Engineers south of the city. On October 18, as these new units moved into position, General Huebner authorised the 26th Infantry to renew the assault.

In Farwick Park, Colonel Corley's battalion set out to regain the ground lost there three days before, pass on to the Salvatorberg, and assist Task Force Hogan's drive on the Lousberg. One platoon rapidly recaptured the Kurhaus. While the enemy sheltered in the basement of the Hotel Quellenhof to escape American shelling, another platoon under 2nd Lieutenant William D. Ratchford stormed into the hotel lobby. Hand grenade duels developed at every entrance to the basement. By the time Lieutenant Ratchford had procured machine guns to fire into the basement, the Germans had had enough. Twenty-five of the enemy had died in the fighting. A search of the hotel revealed large caches of food and ammunition and on the second floor stood a 20mm anti-aircraft gun which the Germans had carted upstairs piece by piece, reassembled, and sited to fire into the park.

With Farwick Park and its buildings firmly in hand, and Colonel Daniel's battalion continuing a methodical advance through the centre of Aachen, the fall of the city now could be only a question of time. The next day, October 19, Colonel Corley's men seized the Salvatorberg against a modicum of resistance. At the same time Task Force Hogan was overrunning the awe-inspiring but ineffectively defended heights of the Lousberg. Because 30th Division troops already had occupied the village of Laurensberg, General Huebner changed the task force's second mission to cutting the Aachen-Laurensberg highway a short distance south of the village. By nightfall on October 19 a part of the task force had occupied a château within 200 yards of this road. In the château the men found stacks of ammunition of various types and, to their chagrin, whisky bottles — all empty — scattered about the grounds.



Above: At least Signal Corps photographer Westcott tried to be helpful in locating this shot as 'Einbahnstrasse'. (US Army)

Below: For our non-German-speaking readers, the western end of Adalbertsteinweg, is no longer a 'one-way street'!

Within the city, Oberst Wilck issued an order of the day during the afternoon of October 19:

The defenders of Aachen will prepare for their last battle. Constricted to the smallest possible space, we shall fight to the last man, the last shell, the last bullet, in accordance with the Führer's orders.

In the face of the contemptible, despicable treason committed by certain individuals, I expect each and every defender of the venerable Imperial City of Aachen to do his duty to the end, in fulfillment of our Oath to the Flag. I expect courage and determination to hold out.

Long live the Führer and our beloved Fatherland!



The historic seat of Charlemagne — the Dom or cathedral — falls once again to an invader. (US Army)



The Hof is another street in inner Aachen now converted into a pedestrian precinct.

Exhortations actually did little to forestall the end. By nightfall on October 19 the German commanders had decided to abandon the defenders of Aachen to their fate. Headquarters of the 1. SS-Panzer Korps was relieved as the 3. Panzer Grenadier Division (reduced to half its original combat strength) prepared to pull out.

On October 19 and 20 resistance rapidly crumbled. Even though the battalion of the 110th Infantry was committed officially only to a defensive role, that unit joined Colonel Daniel's battalion in eviscerating the city. Already Colonel Daniel's men had seized the main railway station and were nearing the railway line leading north to Laurensberg and Geilenkirchen and separating the main part of Aachen from western residential sectors. After the collapse of a strongpoint in the Technical University in the north-western corner of the city, the battalion reached the western railway tracks as night fell on October 20. The few Germans remaining were surrounded in the western and south-western suburbs.

On October 21, Colonel Corley's battalion approached a big air raid bunker at the northern end of Lousberg Strasse. Colonel Corley called for his 155mm big gun. To the attackers, this was just another building that had to be reduced. They had no way of knowing that here was the cerebellum of the Aachen defence, the headquarters of Oberst Wilck. From this bunker Oberst Wilck and his staff had been issuing proclamations: 'All forces are committed in the final struggle!' 'Confined to the smallest area, the last defenders of Aachen are embroiled in their final battle!' 'The last defenders of Aachen, mindful of their beloved German homeland, with firm confidence in our final victory, donate Reichsmarks 10,468.00 to the Winterhilfswerk [Winter Relief] Project. We shall fight on. Long live the Führer!' Such was the tenor of Oberst Wilck's last messages to his superiors on the outside.

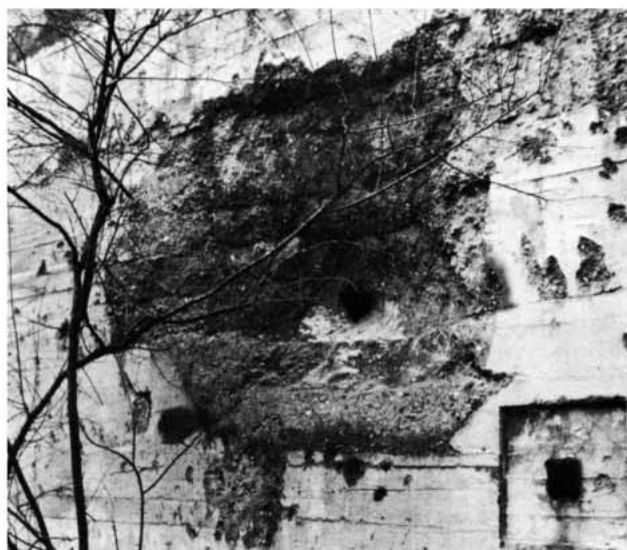
As Colonel Corley called for his 'Big Bertha', Oberst Wilck, despite his exhortations, was ready to end the fight. But how to surrender? Two Germans who had tried to leave the bunker under a white flag had been shot down by the Americans.

The solution appeared to lie among some thirty American prisoners the Germans were holding. From the prisoners they asked for

Oberst Wilck's battle headquarters were located in a huge air raid shelter (see centre pages) which still stands on Rüt-scher Strasse on the western side of the Lousberg. Only superficial damage was caused by the American 155mm shells although one remains firmly embedded in the concrete (below right).



Above: The Hauptbahnhof fell to troopers of the 2nd Battalion although the damage is believed to have been caused by one of the RAF bombing raids. (US Army) Below: Platforms 4 and 5 on the left have since been removed; luckily the stairway on platforms 6 and 7 remains.



In September 1944, Generalleutnant Gehard Graf von Schwerin, commander of the 116. Panzer Division, had been relieved of the command of Aachen when an incriminating letter he had written to the opposing US commander fell into the wrong hands. (The pencilled original is preserved in the Stadtarchiv.) Oberstleutnant Maximilian Leyherr was in charge when the American ultimatum was delivered on October 10 but it fell to Oberst Gerhard Wilck to surrender the city. Here he is being driven into captivity with three of his staff (Major Heimann in the centre) from Corley's CP in the Hansemannsplatz. Wilck's command of the garrison had lasted a mere nine days; his imprisonment by the Allies three years.

volunteers to arrange the surrender and two men from the 1106th Engineers who had been captured early in the battle came forward. They were Staff Sergeant Ewart M. Padgett and Pfc. James B. Haswell.

While Wilck renewed his 'unshakeable faith in our right and our victory' by radio, and again paid obeisance to the Führer, Haswell and Padgett stepped from the



Theaterstrasse, Aachen, October 1944. The last round-up by the troopers of the division nicknamed 'Old Hickory'. However the men of the 30th Infantry preferred their self-adopted title of 'Roosevelt's Butchers'. (US Army)

bunker. Bearing a white flag, the two men dashed into the middle of Lousberg Strasse as small arms fire cracked about them. As they waved the flag frantically the firing died down. An American rifleman leaned from a nearby window to motion the two forward. Sergeant Padgett in turn beckoned to two German officers behind him to follow.

A company commander returned with Haswell, Padgett, and the Germans. Their luggage already packed, Oberst Wilck and his staff were ready to depart. Before they left, Sergeant Padgett nabbed the prize souvenir of the occasion, the colonel's pistol.

At Colonel Corley's headquarters, the assistant divisional commander, Brigadier





For some reason certain comparisons always seem more meaningful than others. The lack of change over the intervening years may be one reason but it is possibly accentuated by the expression on the faces of those depicted. This scene —

one small instant of history captured by Signal Corps photographer Ellett — took place on Weissenburgerstrasse outside Nos. 27 and 29. Now it is just a quiet, clean, unpretentious back street with no visible link with the events of October 1944.

General George A. Taylor, accepted the German surrender and at 12.05 p.m. on October 21 it was all over. Because Oberst Wilck's internal communications had broken

down, he had a precise knowledge of the whereabouts of only some 500 of his soldiers. By nightfall, as American troops swept to every corner of the city, they had rounded up

some 1,600 men, among them a battalion adjutant to whom Lieutenants Lafley and Boehme had delivered the surrender ultimatum eleven days earlier.



As the fighting died in Aachen, the German commander, Generalleutnant Gerhard Graf von Schwerin, who in September had tried to spare the city, would have been horrified to see the once-proud coronation capital. 'The city is as dead as a Roman ruin', wrote one American observer, 'but unlike a ruin it has none of the grace of gradual decay. . . . Burst sewers, broken gas mains and dead animals have raised an almost overpowering smell in many parts of the city. The streets are paved with shattered glass; telephone, electric light and trolley cables are dangling and netted together everywhere, and in many places wrecked cars, trucks, armored vehicles and guns litter the streets. . . .'

The ironic truth of a prophecy which Hitler had made early in his career was nowhere more evident than on October 21, 1944 in Aachen, the first large German city lost in the war: 'Give me five years and you will not recognise Germany again'.

Though the Germans had failed to prevent encirclement and had held out within the city for only five days after it was surrounded, the true measure of the battle from their standpoint was that they had imposed a telling, though costly, delay. The US 30th Division had taken 6,000 prisoners and the 1st Division another 5,637, including 3,473 taken within the city. The way in which German units were squandered without major reward was indicated by the fact that an equivalent of twenty battalions had been used in counter-attack rôles against the 30th Division, yet in only one or two cases had any counter-attack involved more than two reinforced infantry battalions. A never-ending compulsion to stave off recurring crises had sucked the enemy's units into the abyss of piecemeal commitment.

On the American side, the 30th Division and attached troops, had lost some 3,000 men since the start of the West Wall campaign on October 2. Indicative of 1st Division casualties was a figure of 498 incurred by the two battalions of the 26th Infantry. Of these 75 were killed and 9 missing.

Being the first German city to be captured by the Allies, it was also the first to experience Allied Military Government. Key to the success of the administration of defeated Germany was the appointment of a Bürgermeister or mayor for each town and the choice of the right man for the job was a difficult one. Obviously Nazi officials were barred from office as were military leaders which left schoolmasters and the like, local business men, priests especially in Roman Catholic areas, or anyone who had managed to retain sufficient independence of outlook.



Above: 'Empty your pockets!' seems to be the command in Rolandstrasse — a significant street to us as the anti-tank gun on page 19 is standing by the corner of the building with the pediment in the centre. (US Army) Below: Comparison from the balcony of No. 5.



Today a new city has risen from the ruins — this is in Franzstrasse looking from the junction with Alexianergraben. (US Army)



The 30th Infantry Division set up their command post in this building on the Monheimsallee beside the Hotel Quellenhof.



Above: Freshly-dug German graves lie in a small park opposite one of the town's massive air raid shelters. (US Army) Below: This is the western end of Saarstrasse today — with the fading of the years the red cross has all but disappeared.

In the case of Aachen the Americans appointed a solicitor Franz Oppenhoff, although he realised that until the war was over he would be considered a traitor by the Nazis. His apprehension was well founded as he was assassinated in his own home in March 1945. In May, with the introduction of the zones of occupation, Aachen fell within the British sphere, marking yet another foreign occupation of Charlemagne's historic city. Some eighty per cent of the town lay in ruins — from the RAF bombing and American shelling — although miraculously the cathedral with its royal tomb was relatively unscathed.

Today the city has once again regained its place as a thriving German city although the dual name of Aix-la-Chapelle still heralds its presence to the visitor approaching from the West. Much of the old Siegfried Line has been rooted out from around the city although once one strays off the main highways dragon's teeth and shattered pillboxes, many the result of deliberate demolition, can still be discovered. Within the city the most famous landmark of all still stands — an event which is remarkable in itself given the German preoccupation with eliminating all traces of the war, both physically and mentally. Although its outline is softened by the post-war growth of a line of poplars, Oberst Wilck's bunker headquarters still stands on Rüttscher Strasse. The wall facing west is heavily pock-marked by the shelling of Colonel Corley's 155mm cannon, and it contains one unique souvenir — a shell still firmly embedded in the concrete!



Scars of the battle still to be seen in an Aachen back street.







THE FIRST OF THE MANY

During the course of the Second World War a total of some 1,060 German aircraft were brought down or crashed over British soil. Almost as soon as Neville Chamberlain had concluded his historic broadcast to the nation on September 3, 1939, sirens were sounded warning of an impending air raid. That raid never came, and it was not until October that enemy air action was seen in reality over the British Isles. On the 16th of that month the two Scottish auxiliary squadrons — No. 602 (City of Glasgow) and 603 (City of Edinburgh) — drew the first blood of the Royal Air Force over the United Kingdom when they intercepted and shot down a Junkers Ju 88 off Crail and a Heinkel He 111 off Port Seton, Scotland. Twelve days later, on the 28th, both squadrons were again involved in combat over Scotland resulting in the destruction of an He 111 which crashed near the village of Humber, the first enemy aircraft to be brought down on British soil. This is the story of that incident.

Operating from Westerland on the island of Sylt, the Stabs Staff of Kampfgeschwader 26 'Vestigium Leonis' were engaged during October 1939 on long range armed reconnaissance missions over the North Sea and Scottish sea areas in what became known to the Luftwaffe crews as the 'Watery Triangle'. Such long range flights, often covering a return trip of some one thousand miles, called for the utmost vigilance, flying skill and stamina. The port bomb racks on these aircraft had been removed, and fitted in their place was a bank of cameras, thus enabling the aircraft to effectively undertake their task of tactical reconnaissance to determine the movements of British ships and, where possible, to engage shipping targets.

BY ANDY SAUNDERS

Saturday, October 28, 1939, saw Rolf Niehoff and his crew of Stab KG26 on just such a mission, flying aircraft number 5449, coded 1H+JA.

The operation commenced according to plan, with Leutnant Niehoff navigating the course across the North Sea to the first target area, the Firth of Clyde, at an altitude of 6,000 metres, passing over the Firth of Forth en route but unable to take photographs there because of cloud cover. Returning from the west coast to the Forth again, but now down to an altitude of 5,000 metres, Niehoff found that the cloud had thinned, although this, in

Patrol over the 'Watery Triangle'. In October 1939, Stab Staff of KG26 was engaged on long distance patrols over the Scottish sea areas — this shipping is in the Firth of Forth. These propaganda photographs belie the facts: in reality the thousand-mile round trips were long and weary . . . fraught with danger . . . from both the enemy and the elements.





turn, afforded a better view to those manning anti-aircraft guns below, who, already alerted to the Heinkel's presence, put up an effective barrage. Either a lucky shot or good marksmanship resulted in one of the very first rounds exploding near the fuselage, and from that moment on the Heinkel's fate was sealed.

Also alerted to the presence of the intruder was No. 13 Group, RAF Fighter Command, which at that time had Spitfires of both 602 and 603 Squadrons engaged on patrol. Additionally, on observing the Heinkel overflying Drem, Yellow Section of 602 Squadron were ordered off to pursue the intruder by the Commanding Officer at 10.45 a.m. Failing to make contact they were diverted to investigate an unidentified aircraft near May Island which they located and identified as a twin-engined enemy machine before going into a line astern attack. Unfortunately for Yellow

The first German aircraft down on British (sorry Scottish) soil. After smashing through a dry stone wall (below), still unrepaired over forty years later, it came to rest with its back broken. A solitary tree marks the spot today.





It is important to remember that in the Luftwaffe, unlike British or American air force tradition, the captain of the aircraft did not necessarily have to be the pilot. Thus on the last flight of 1H+JA Leutnant Niehoff was the navigator.

Section it was an RAF Anson and, realising their mistake, the Section Leader, Flight Lieutenant Hodge, ordered the section to break off the attack but not before the pilot of the Anson had been hit and wounded in the jaw.

Meanwhile Red Section of 602, led by Flying Officer Archie McKellar, were on Turnhouse patrol whilst Red Section of 603, led by Flight Lieutenant Patrick Gifford, were airborne over the Forth. Both units, however, were only alerted to the presence of the Heinkel by spotting the anti-aircraft bursts.

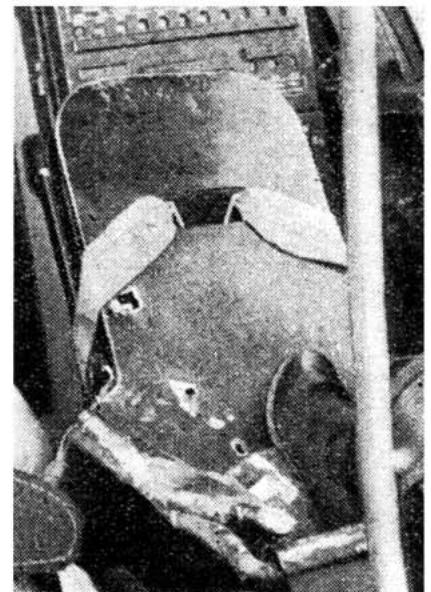
As soon as Niehoff heard and felt the impact of the explosion he ordered his pilot, Unteroffizier Kurt Lehmkuhl, to jettison the bombs and dive for the now thinning cloud cover below them at 2,000 metres in order to hide, a manoeuvre they had used successfully on the previous raid of October 16 in the same area. This time, however, the rapidly dissolving clouds gave no cover at all and the descending fighters soon found their quarry. No. 602 Squadron, with the better advantage of positioning and a patrol height of 10,000 feet, were first into attack, line astern. No. 603 Squadron, slightly higher at 14,000 feet, followed 602 and the successive assaults of the six Spitfires riddled the Heinkel from stern to stern, wingtip to wingtip, in attacks which lasted right up until the aircraft crashed.

Firstly the port engine was hit, followed shortly after by the starboard. On board the aircraft, amid the shambles of bullet-raked aluminium, shattered perspex and instruments, severed cables and controls, Niehoff sat at the side of his young but able pilot, Lehmkuhl, still in control of his crippled bomber despite the agony of back wounds from .303 bullets. Behind them lay the two other crew-members, the wireless operator/air gunner Gefreiter Bruno Reimann and flight engineer/air gunner Unteroffizier Gottlieb Kowalke, shot dead whilst changing the ammunition drums of their MG15s. Below them lay the Firth of Forth, Luftwaffe target No. 416, surrounded by terrain which, to say the least, did not lend itself to a forced landing — but that was the only option open to Niehoff and Lehmkuhl. With insufficient height to bale out and dead engines smoking, the aircraft was now in a rapidly descending glide over the Lammermuir Hills. When first approaching the ground the landing speed was too high, but Lehmkuhl skilfully slowed down the plane allowing it to touch the ground just as it had reached the stall and had zero forward speed.

The point at which the aeroplane had alighted was on a hillside between High Latch and Kidlaw, to the east of Humber village. Smashing through a dry stone wall and



Note Rolf Niehoff is holding his back — it was in fact broken!



Lehmkuhl's bullet-holed seat.

tearing off its starboard tailplane, the Heinkel skidded, bumped and bounced a good number of yards uphill, eventually coming to rest with its bullet-scarred fuselage looking not unlike the body of some stranded shark, its back broken and the smashed nose and cockpit canopy resembling its open gaping jaws.

Officially, the Heinkel was awarded as a joint kill to the two RAF squadrons with no credit given to the anti-aircraft gunners. Interestingly, the 3rd (Scottish) Anti-Aircraft Division report for this day states that 'No AA gun stations opened fire' so it must therefore be assumed that the barrage originated from the considerable number of naval vessels lying at anchor at Queensferry in the Firth of Forth, including the destroyer HMS *Mohawk* and the cruisers HMS *Belfast* and HMS *Edinburgh*, both more famous in latter years.

Apart from the experiences of Rolf Niehoff which were detailed in a letter from his home in Fürstenfeldbruck, near Munich, in 1981, we are fortunate to have traced a very vivid description of the incident in the eye witness version of events provided by airline pilot Alex Imrie, then a young schoolboy. Such is the value and importance of this account that one can only do justice by reproducing the story exactly as related by Alex:

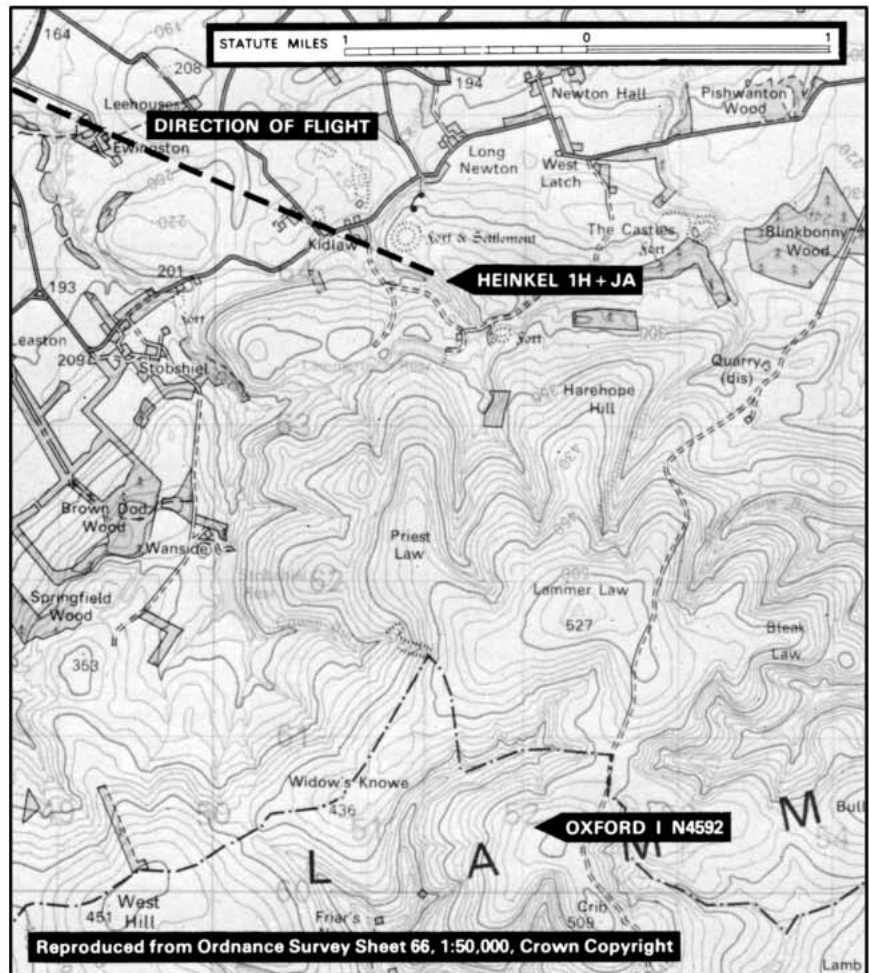
'A moorland shoot was arranged for Saturday, October 28, 1939, and as one of the beaters I was employed to drive the game towards the gentlemen's guns for which I was to be paid the princely sum of five shillings, and be given a lunch of a pork pie and a bottle of lemonade!

'With the other boys that morning all the talk was of an aeroplane that had crashed on the Lammermuir Hills only two days before, killing the two men on board. My father had already been to the crash site and he had told me that the aeroplane was a Lockheed Vega. He deduced this name since he had read Lockheed on some part of the aeroplane, and the Vega was possibly the only name that he knew associated with Lockheed.

'During the forenoon aeroplanes appeared with amazing suddenness, these were Spitfires and they all appeared to be diving and firing their guns at Kidlaw Hill two miles to the east. They kept this up for a seemingly long time, and I remember that the sound of the guns firing did not really sound like what I thought a machine gun should sound like at all, it being more of a tearing noise. We all took this to be a token of respect for the fallen airmen, and thought that the Spitfires were firing a salute to the dead of two days previously.

'A shepherd's son with us did not partake of the pie and lemonade lunch but went home for his food to his nearby cottage home. He arrived back early and out of breath with the news that a big German aeroplane had landed on Kidlaw Hill and that Jock Imrie (my father) had got a thermos flask and a can of tinned meat (bully beef) from it. We just could not wait until the end of the day, and when we were finally released from our duties and had been paid our respective five shillings, we departed at high speed on our bicycles for Kidlaw Farm.

'There was considerable activity there (people and cars) for a country Scottish farmstead, and it was easy to find the way to the German aeroplane. We left the road, followed the cart track, abandoned our bikes and started up the hillside through knee-high heather and heath. Soon we were upon it, a big grey Heinkel 111, laying on a slight incline in the ground with its nose pushed in and its back broken. Apart from about fifty civilians there were a number of RAF officers who were concentrated around the cockpit area. A number of aircraftmen armed with rifles stood around and they were in the act of putting up a rope around the aeroplane to keep the more inquisitive away. Two incendiary bombs were removed from the aeroplane as we were there and moved some way from it and placed under



August 1983 — the last relic — the one that Alex missed! A surprising find after so many years and so many souvenir hunters. We found this six-foot section buried beside the crash site.

the watchful eye of an armed airman. Absolutely riddled with bullet holes, the machine was a light blue underneath, and had a lion in a shield marking on the sides of the fuselage nose. The shorn-off right-hand tailplane had been collected and brought in from the dry stone dyke about 100 yards away that it had hit on landing. We stayed until dark, then were urged to move away by the guards.

'At home I found that my father did not have a thermos flask or any canned meat, although at the time he could have "collected" that sort of souvenir, but he wanted something with German writing on it and walked back to the severed tailplane to remove the makers nameplate, breaking the blade of his penknife in the effort. He commented on how fresh and clean the observer looked, and also remarked that the dead gunners were carried down the hillside using five-barred wooden gates as stretchers.

'The next day (Sunday, October 29) we went to the British aircraft crash, this was soon identified as an Airspeed Oxford despite the fact that the machine being of wood and fabric construction had literally disintegrated on hitting the ground. The large area strewn with wreckage was visible from miles away. This was to us better than the German aeroplane where people kept telling you not to touch anything, here one could help oneself, and out came the pliers and screwdrivers! It is true to say that in a few weeks most of that aeroplane disappeared, even the seven-cylinder Cheetah engines were taken apart and robbed of various components. With our hauls we passed the Heinkel site on our way home and there was a steady stream of people going up and coming down from it. It provided a real weekend sightseeing tour for hundreds if not thousands of people.

'At school on Monday the Heinkel was at first the main topic of conversation, but instruments and other odds and ends from the Oxford slowly gained for it number one place. For a long time we were reminded of the Heinkel since our school bus had collected a bullet hole from either a British or German gun that Saturday morning. The starred window did not fall out and for weeks the bus carried this souvenir. The pupils were under the threat that despite the window having a bullet hole, if anyone broke that window they would still have to pay for it! Needless to say the honour fell to your humble scribe who pushed out the glass while fighting with another boy. I seem to remember a telling-off but do not think that my family were billed for the window.

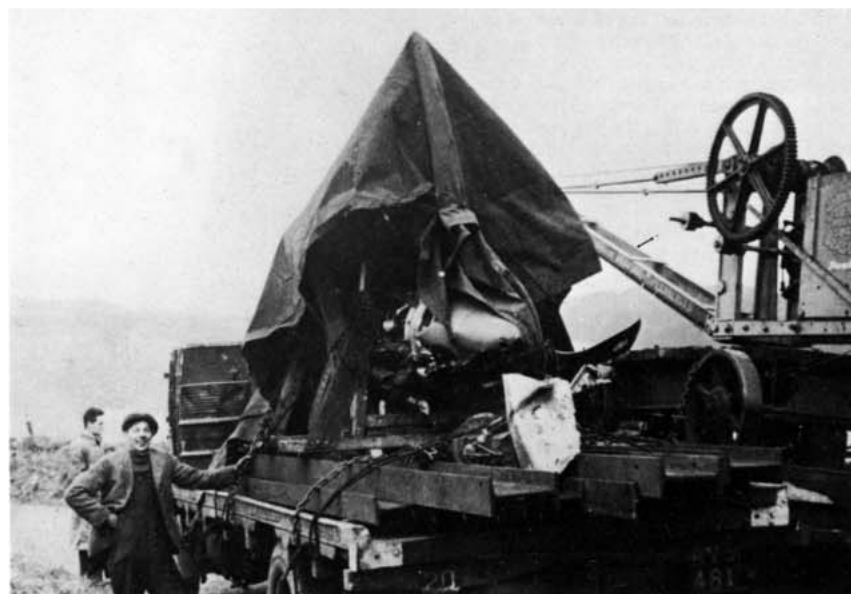
'Most evenings after that weekend I would cycle up to the Heinkel landing site and spend an hour or so chatting to the airmen on guard, I was allowed to sit in the pilot's seat, and remember feeling the sharp edges of the aluminium around the bullet holes in the seat back and bottom that had wounded the pilot. After about a week only the forward section of the fuselage was left, then that too went, until there was only flattened heather and many little scraps of perspex and grey and blue painted aluminium to show that there had ever been anything there.'

The Oxford aircraft to which Alex refers in his narrative was in fact Oxford I, N4592, of No. 13 Flying Training School, Drem, which dived into Lammer Law for obscure reasons on October 26, 1939, killing both trainee pilots, Corporal Basil F. Evans and Corporal Charles Thorpe who were subsequently buried at Dirleton. From the widely-spread wreckage of the Oxford, Alex Imrie was able to salvage part of the yellow fuselage fabric bearing the serial, N4592, but the crash site yielded no surviving relic when visited by aviation archaeologist Malcolm Spaven in 1976.

When the Heinkel had finally come to rest, a shaken Rolf Niehoff clambered from the aircraft, helping his wounded pilot out on to the heather. A graphic account of events at that point in the story was broadcast on the



We are indebted to Flight Lieutenant Bill McConnell, RAF VR(T), of the 2175 (Rolls-Royce) Squadron, Air Training Corps, for supplying these photographs illustrating the dismantling of the machine. Copied from Willie Gilmarpin's photo album, Willie (seen in the dark mackintosh and trilby) was the engineer at Rolls-Royce sent to retrieve an engine for testing, later becoming a civilian instructor with the squadron.





BBC shortly afterwards by John K. Irvine of nearby Long Newton Farm who was on the spot within four minutes of the crash. Once again, a verbatim account of Mr Irvine's broadcast story is a must:

'I was filling up sacks of barley about a quarter past ten when I heard a noise like the hurling of a barrow. That's what I thought it was at first, but it went on and on and came nearer, and then I knew it was the noise of guns. Then we saw a big black machine with two engines coming over the trees from the north-west. There were four British machines with it. They were circling round and rattling bullets into the German hard as they could do it.

'I thought we ought to take cover, there were women workers there, but curiosity brought us out again, while we were running in and while we were running out, so that we saw the German go over the houses, so low that it almost touched the chimneys. Then they all went out of sight up over the hill, and a few minutes later I saw our fighters going back, all four of them. They seemed to be finished with the job, so we ran up the hill to see what had happened.

'Two of the crew were dead. I expect they would be the gunners, and they must have been shot before they came my length because I never saw them firing at our planes. The machine had scraped its tail over a dyke and came down on the moor on an even keel. One of the crew was not hurt at all. He was pulling out his mate. By the time we got up there he had him drawn out and lying on the ground.

'We tried to talk to the unwounded man but he did not know what we were saying, although he spoke a little English. The wounded man said he wanted a drink, but the doctor said he ought not to have one. He had two bullet wounds in the back.

'The police took the unwounded man away. Before he went he shook hands with his mate. We got a gate off one of the fences and carried the wounded man down to the road and waited there till the ambulance came for him.'

This contemporary account of events must be considered to be essentially correct in detail, made as it was at the time of the event. It does, however, raise one or two interesting points. Mr Irvine refers to only four British fighters, and indeed in his 1981 account Rolf Niehoff mentions only four machines yet according to the Operation Records Books of both 602 and 603 Squadrons, two sections, each of three Spitfires, took part in the attack.

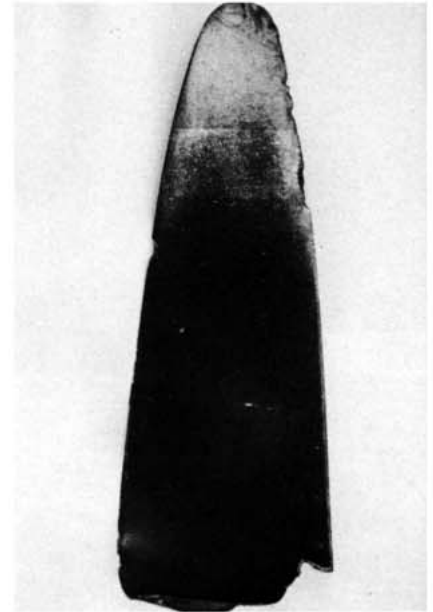
This panel, removed from the port wing by Willie Gilmarpin in 1939, provided the motivation for the formation of the 602 (City of Glasgow) Squadron Museum opened in October 1983 at Hillingdon, Glasgow. It was given to the Rolls-Royce ATC and sparked off the cadets' interest in the history of their home squadron. Located in their headquarters in Queen Elizabeth Avenue, it is the first permanent tribute to the city's own Royal Air Force squadron.



However, in Flying Officer McKellar's combat report, particular mention is made of the attack by three other Spitfires (those of 603 flown by Gifford, Robertson and Gilroy) which attacked after his section had broken off the engagement. It would appear that the other two aircraft of McKellar's section had for some reason broken away from or lost their leader and the Heinkel, and therefore the four machines which Mr Irvine saw, and which Rolf Niehoff remembered, were undoubtedly those of Gifford, Robertson, Gilroy and McKellar. The identity of the doctor who visited the crash is not known, but the wounded man was removed, after his unglorious journey down the hillside on a gate, to hospital at Edinburgh. It was to Edinburgh, too, that the bodies of the two dead crewmen were taken after they had likewise been carried down the hillside on the improvised gate stretcher for eventual burial

on October 31 in adjacent graves at Edinburgh's Portobello Cemetery. To Edinburgh also came Niehoff eventually, although certainly not as an unwounded man as was widely believed and reported.

Niehoff surrendered to some policemen who arrived on the scene, who he recalled as 'friendly', and was taken down the hillside to a nearby police station. From here an Army captain took him to a large country estate, the headquarters of an Army unit, where he was entertained to lunch. After he had dined it was off to the guardroom of Edinburgh Castle, where he spent the afternoon, and it was here that he was interrogated by RAF officers who were particularly interested in details of the Heinkel's self-sealing petrol tanks and the fuel injection system. That night he was taken to London by train to spend a few days in the Tower of London where it was discovered that the 'unwounded'



Niehoff was in fact suffering from a broken back, sustained in the violent impact of the crash! (It is interesting to note that in the photograph of Niehoff taken shortly after the crash, he is holding his left hand to the small of his back.) Four months' treatment at Woolwich Hospital followed, before eventual removal to No. 1 Prisoner of War Camp, Grizedale Hall, (see *After the Battle* No. 2) and then transfer to Canada in 1941. Post-war, Niehoff made a career in the modern Luftwaffe, rising to the rank of Major before retiring. Coincidentally, Alex Imrie lived only a few hundred yards from Niehoff in the Steglitz area of Berlin during 1964, and succeeded in making contact with him at that time. Efforts to trace Lehmkuhl, the pilot, failed then and subsequent attempts have also met with little success but it is believed he returned to Germany after the war to work as a truck driver.

Of the Heinkel itself, not unnaturally great interest was shown by the authorities as well as the 600-odd inhabitants of Humber. Its dismantling and removal was begun on October 31, 1939, by No. 63 Maintenance Unit — the same day as the burial of its two dead crew. The airframe was taken piecemeal to the Royal Aircraft Establishment at Farnborough, where it was subjected to a rigorous examination which resulted in a 59-page report entitled *Examination of Enemy Aircraft No. EA/1*, covering such items as instruments, electrical equipment, general airframe and even a detailed inspection of a stopwatch and the chemical analysis of perspex from the cockpit canopy. Such was the detail of the report that it was not completed until August 1941, by which time scores of other Heinkel 111s had fallen over the UK, only to be afforded a brief cursory examination before scrapping.

The Jumo 211A engines were also the subject of an RAE report in December 1939, but not before they had been taken to Rolls-Royce at Derby for evaluation on No. 8 Experimental Bed, Nightingale Road, having been removed from the crash site by a local haulage contractor, 'Bubbly' Young, and taken via Rolls-Royce at Hillington, Glasgow. It was at Derby that engineer Chris Harrison worked on the port engine (No. 50657) and made the following interesting diary entries of his experiences:

November 14 Had Jumo on No. 8 Test Bed.
November 21 Took hell of a lot of starting.
Bad oil leak. Fires erratically.
November 23/24 Working on injector.
November 25 Erratic running.

This access panel from the port engine is also in the museum — the photograph below proves its provenance, as it also does for the propeller tip (above right) now displayed in the Scottish United Services Museum in Edinburgh Castle.



November 27 Realised some of injector pistons were seized due to forced landing damage.
November 30 Jumo running. Too rich on one bank.
December 1 Damned silly Jumo — refused to start!
December 2 Stripped injector — runs OK at light loads and have now got job weighed up.
December 4 Fed up! Expert from CAV took all the injector bits!
December 15 Junkers won't act sensibly.
December 17 Junkers seems to have a control missing.
December 19 Up to rated power.
January 9 Max Millar (Flight) came over to Bed 8. Had backfire whilst running simulated altitude checks and broke supercharger.
January 11 Fitting supercharger off other Jumo.
January 12 Running OK.
January 13 Blew Jumo up in big way!!

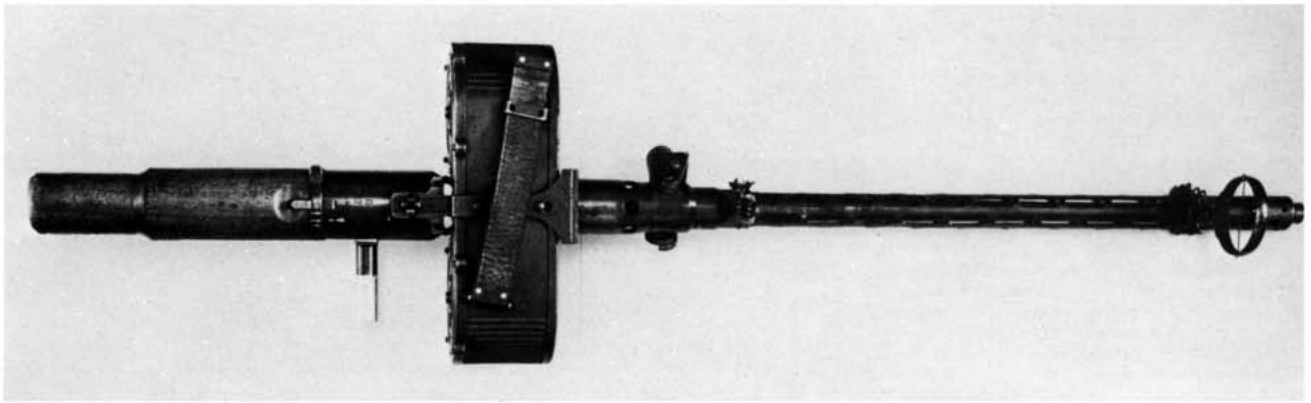
Chris Harrison, now living in New South Wales, retained as souvenirs from that engine three small hexagonal-headed alloy caps from the recalcitrant injector which he had mounted on an oak plaque. This was offered

for auction by Sotheby King and Chasemore at Pulborough, West Sussex on September 16, 1980. The sale catalogue described the items (Lot 1159) as:

'An interesting mounted display of items from the first enemy aircraft shot down over Great Britain in W.W.II, comprising:- Three injector components, showing signs of crash damage and retaining traces of fine lock wire, two photographs of aircraft He 111, two RAF buttons, Pilots wings and two inert .303 bullets, mounted on oak plaque 34cm x 42cm, with folder containing photocopies of newspaper and magazine articles and official reports.'

The buttons, wings and bullets were for decorative effect rather than having any relevance to the incident, but the lot nevertheless sold for £100 at the auction to collector Francis Engelen. Within the space of two years the plaque was again on the market, this time realising only £75 as Lot 531 at the Wallis & Wallis auction of militaria in Lewes on October 27, 1982.

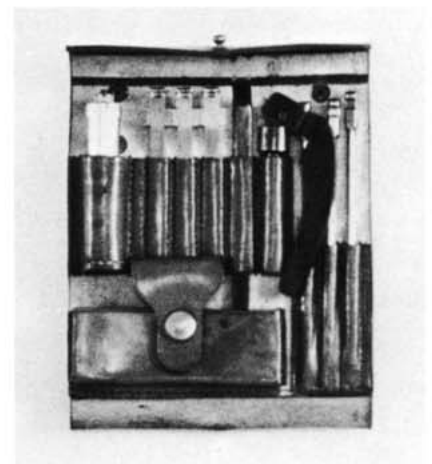
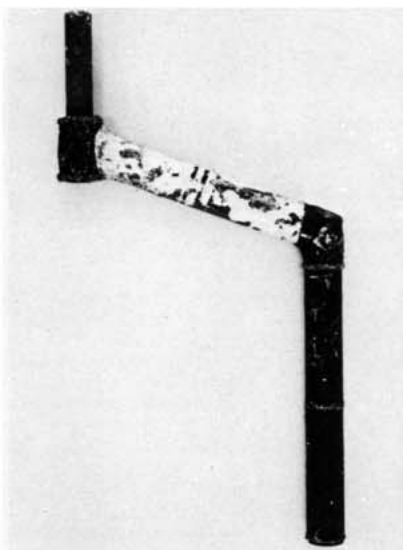
Apart from the previously mentioned makers plate held by Alex Imrie, other relics of the Humber Heinkel still survive today. Indeed, it was two removable access panels from the Heinkel which turned up recently in Glasgow and were handed to Flight



MG15 donated to the Scottish United Services Museum by 602 Squadron in 1952; the magazine from 603 Squadron in 1961.



No. 602 Squadron also presented this Mae West and Mr A. M. Dick gave Rolf Niehoff's flying suit in 1972 — still with a piece of perspex in the pocket.



The starting handle, taken as a souvenir at the time, was given by Mr. T. Carlin of Edinburgh in 1973 and the City of Glasgow Squadron gave the fire extinguisher after they were disbanded in 1957.

It is a shame that out of all these items, only the bloodstained tool kit for the MG15 is on display. The other exhibits were kindly retrieved from the store for us to photograph and are reproduced by permission of the Scottish United Services Museum.

Lieutenant W. McConnell of No. 2175 (Rolls-Royce) Squadron of the Air Training Corps which sparked off the 602 Squadron Museum project at the Rolls-Royce Hillington works in Glasgow. Opened in October 1983, the museum boasts a considerable collection of 602 Squadron memorabilia, including these items from the Humble Heinkel.

At the Royal Aircraft Establishment a number of artefacts from Second World War German aircraft are to be found in the Establishment's museum, but considering the fact that these items were preserved for technical rather than historic reasons it is not surprising that the provenance of many of these relics is somewhat doubtful. Not in dispute, however, is the model propeller at the museum made of metal from the Humble Heinkel.

By far the largest collection of trophies from the Heinkel rest, appropriately, in Edinburgh Castle in the Scottish United Services Museum. Rolf Neihoff's flying suit was presented to the museum by Mr A. M. Dick of Kilmarnock while the starting handle came from Mr T. Carlin of Edinburgh. No. 602 Squadron gave the bullet-holed tip of one of the propellers, the MG15 machine gun and its tool kit, Mae West, and fire extinguisher, while 603 Squadron presented a magazine for the MG15 and the compass. Two of these items, the tool kit and prop blade, are exhibited in the museum's RAF Room, together with the pilot's log book of Patrick Gifford — opened at the page relating to the Humble incident. Doubtless other souvenirs also survive elsewhere although the whereabouts of part of 5449's tailplane, which were displayed from the flagpole at the main gate of RAF Turnhouse during the Battle of Britain display on September 15, 1945, remains a mystery.

By some strange coincidence it was again Scotland, this time Fraserburgh, that saw the last enemy aircraft to come down within the British Isles. It landed on May 2, 1945 with a crew of five defectors piloted by Oberleutnant Rolf Kunze. The Junkers 188A-3, Werke Nr. 190335, 1H+AT, was also, oddly, from KG26, 9th Staffel. But that's another story!



Gottlieb Kowalke and Bruno Reimann were first buried in Grave 162 in Section R of Edinburgh's Portobello Cemetery. In the 1960s they were reburied at the German Soldatenfriedhof at Cannock Chase in adjacent graves (474/475) in Block 3.





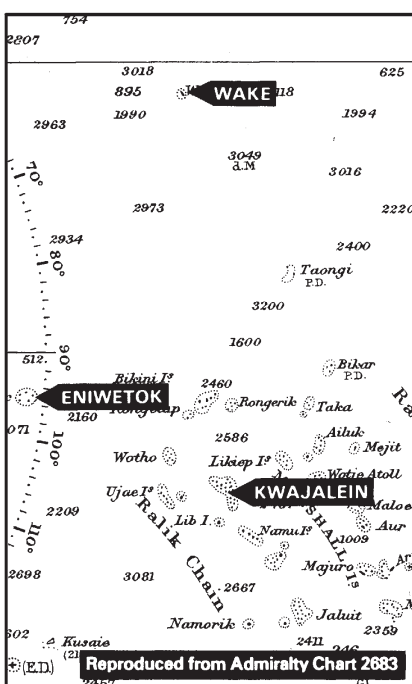
Wake is one of the world's smallest inhabited islands located 2,000 miles west of Hawaii, 1,225 miles east by north of Guam, and 1,032 miles south-west of Midway. It was probably first sighted on October 2, 1568 by a Spaniard, Alvaro de Mendana who named it San Francisco — its present-day name stemming from Captain William Wake of the British schooner *Prince William Henry* which called there in 1796. Wake is in actual fact the largest of three islands which form a lagoon enclosed on three sides — the others being named Wilkes and Peale in 1923 — later to be linked with the main island by bridges.

February 4, 1942. Wake has fallen barely two months previously yet a Douglas TBD-1 Devastator from the carrier Enterprise is quick to retaliate. Wilkes Island is on the left and Peale Islet in the right background. (National Archives)

Although uninhabited, in early days a cache of supplies was provided for the chance victims of shipwreck, a common occurrence in an area subject to freak storms and tidal waves. It was formally claimed by the United States in 1899 for the site of a cable station, but it was the emergence of the aeroplane

which set the seal on the future of Wake when Pan American Airways decided the island lagoon would be an ideal staging base for their transpacific air route. Wake was placed under US Navy jurisdiction in 1934 and in May the following year the construction of a seaplane base was begun on Peale Island — windward

Wake today. Civil flights were re-started in July 1946 and the military base was decommissioned on June 1, 1947. (Federal Aviation Administration)





Above: Pre-war shot of the Pan American Airways control building — note the Pan Am flag. (National Archives) Below: All that remains today of the flying boat boarding slipway. (All present day photos on Wake by Bill Oliver.)



of the lagoon — from which the flying boats would operate. Within two months Clippers were regularly using the base as a stop over port between Midway and Guam, and a hotel and other facilities were soon provided for the convenience of passengers.

With the portent of war, the military potential of Wake as an advanced outpost against Japan was appreciated and work began on the construction of a land-based Naval Air Station on Wake Island itself, one main E-W runway being completed by the outbreak of war in December 1941. The military took over the Pan American installations and, just across the bridge on Wake, Camp No. 2 was established for the civilian construction work force. Marines for defence of the outpost were quartered in Camp No. 1 on the opposite tip of Wake near the channel separating Wake and Wilkes.

The First Marine Defense Battalion, under the command of Major James P. S. Devereux, arrived at Wake on October 15, 1941 to man the six 5-inch coast-defence guns, twelve 3-inch AA guns, four searchlights and eighteen .50 and .30 calibre machine guns which had been installed. Late in November, a small task force comprising the carrier *Enterprise*, protected by two heavy cruisers and a few destroyers, made a high-speed run from Pearl Harbor to a point north-east of Wake where twelve Grumman F4F Wildcats of Marine Fighter Squadron VMF-211, commanded by Major Paul A. Putnam, were launched to fly to the island. Ill-prepared for war, they comprised the islands' total aerial defence. At this point, Commander Winfield Scott

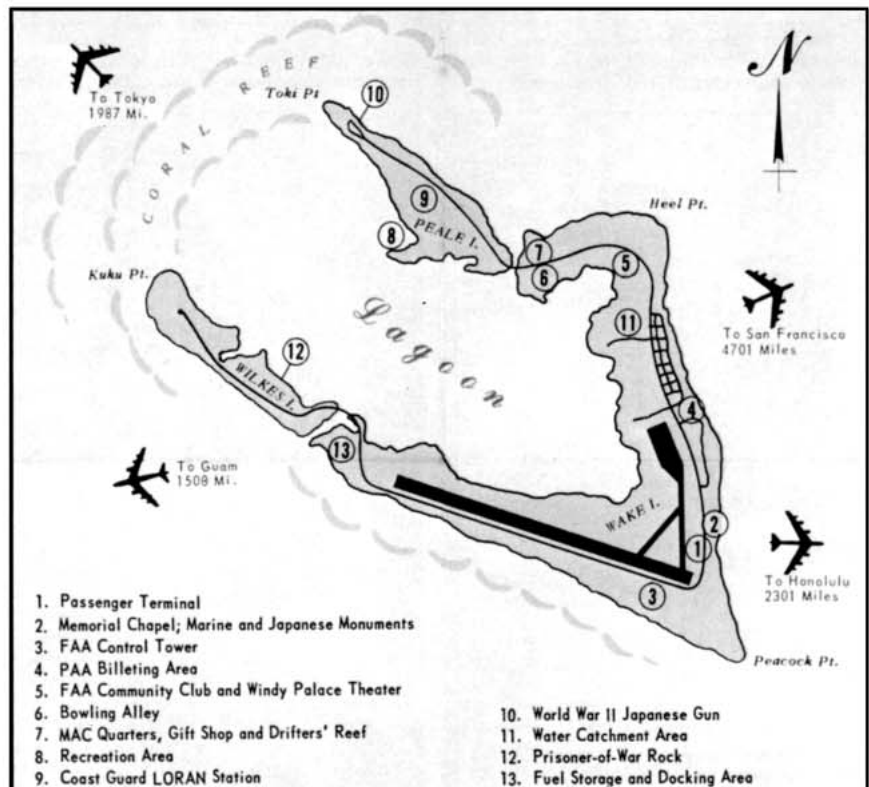
Cunningham, the Island Commander, had at his disposal the following personnel:

Navy Base:	72
Army Signal Detachment:	6
First Marine Defense Battalion:	379
VMF-211:	59
Pan American employees:	70
Civilian contractors:	1,146

Wake is one day ahead of Hawaii but two and a half hours later by the clock; hence the attack on Pearl Harbor launched at 8.00 a.m. on December 7 was timed at 5.30 a.m. December 8 on Wake. The first word of the Japanese action was received by Commander Cunningham at 6.50 a.m. and troops immediately manned battle stations. Unlike Hawaii, which was beyond the range of land-based aircraft, Wake could be reached from the Japanese bases at Kwajalein, 637 miles to the south, and Eniwetok just 530 miles away to the south-west. The morning patrol was already up and more aircraft were readied for action. The China Clipper had already taken off for Guam when the news arrived but it picked up the radio message, turned about, and landed in the lagoon at 9.30 a.m. The machine was still on the water, being prepared for a reconnaissance flight around the island, when at 11.58 a.m. the Japanese struck. Aided by cloudy conditions and the noise of the surf, eighteen Japanese twin-engined bombers hit the island in a surprise concentrated bombing and strafing attack. Worst hit was VMF-211 which lost 23 officers and men with 11 wounded — 58 per cent of its entire strength. Seven of its aircraft were destroyed on the ground and the Clipper was riddled although still flyable and fuel supplies were set ablaze.

Throughout the rest of the day, and on through the night, everyone on the islands toiled to prepare the defences against the now-expected invasion. The runway was mined and connected up for electrical detonation and a large load of concrete blocks and dynamite prepared to block the channel. Slit trenches and revetments were dug to protect man and machine.

At 11.45 a.m. next morning, 27 bombers returned, scoring a hit on the Navy-civilian hospital in Camp 2 and killing 21. T/Sgt. W.



J. Hamilton drew first blood for VMF-211 by shooting down one plane while anti-aircraft fire accounted for another, and two more aircraft were shot down by Captain Henry T. Elrod during a follow-up raid on the morning of December 10. By now the Japanese must have felt they had softened up the island sufficiently for a direct assault. Approaching the islands during the night of the 11th, the Japanese task force consisted of the cruisers *Yubari*, *Tenryu* and *Tatsuta*; destroyers *Sagiri*, *Kisaragi*, *Hayate* and *Oite*, the last two carrying troops; the assault transports *Kimyu Maru* and *Hongo Maru* and *Patrol Craft 32* and *33*.

Commander Cunningham decided his best course would be to hold his fire until the ships came well within range to ensure that every shot counted. At 6.10 a.m. the order was given to open fire, the range by then being from 4,500 to 6,000 yards. The Kuku Point battery on Wilkes blew up the leading destroyer after its sixth salvo and a cruiser was hit five times from Peacock Point. Hits were also scored on two more destroyers, a second cruiser and a transport before a second destroyer was sunk by the Toki Point battery on Peale firing across the lagoon. At this point the four remaining fighters on the island went into action obtaining hits on a cruiser and a transport. This highly successful routing of the first invasion attempt with no casualties whatsoever to the defenders, resulted in the *Hayate* and *Kisaragi* being sunk, the Japanese later admitting that 5,350 men all told had been lost. Three Japanese bombers were also shot down in a simultaneous air attack. It was probably the most successful action by a small force in the entire war.

Over the eight days Wake suffered almost daily bombing raids, VMF-211 losing two more of their precious Wildcats, the other two being kept serviceable by cannibalisation from the other wrecks.

December 21 heralded a new phase in the battle when the Japanese launched carrier-based aircraft against the island. This move obviously signalled the return of the task force which had returned to Kwajalein for repairs. The following day a second massed raid was met vainly by the two surviving Wildcats — both were shot down and thereafter the island was without air cover. About 3.00 a.m. on the 22nd *Patrol Craft 32* and *33* were deliberately



The last Marine to leave Wake in December 1941, Colonel Walter L. J. Bayler, is given the honour of being the first man to set foot on the island after surrender in September 1945. This was one of the locations for which Bill Oliver searched in vain — time and tide having drastically altered the face of the atoll. (National Archives)

run onto the reef off the lightly-defended south central shore of the main island to enable 800 Japanese marines to wade ashore, with a further 300 being set down from landing barges. A sole 3-inch gun had been set up in this area and this was hastily manned by 2nd Lieutenant Robert M. Hanna, USMC, and a scratch crew. In between the gun and the beach, Major Putnam and Captains Elrod and Tharin, all of VMF-211, and a few civilians manned two dugouts where they held out, surrounded by 200 of the enemy, for over six hours.

Bypassing any small pockets of resistance, the Japanese soon overran the weak opposition, expanding both east and west,

cutting communications. By 9.00 a.m. Commander Cunningham had decided that with no chance of receiving outside help, further resistance would be hopeless, and Major Devereux and one of his men went out with a white rag held aloft to be met by the Japanese. With no way of contacting the isolated posts still resisting, his only course was to march round the island informing each group personally — a dangerous procedure which resulted in attracting at least one bayonet charge! Hanna's gun was still holding out and there he ordered the wounded Major Putnam to surrender.

Precise casualties are difficult to determine. The Japanese lost about 130 killed in the



Left: The surrender with Rear Admiral Shigematsu Sakaibara on the right. Right: Crocodile tears for the fallen? A Japanese bows to the grave of W. H. L. Miles who died on July 15, 1942. Wake Cemetery was decommissioned on March 18, 1947 and



all the remains transferred aboard LST-711 by the 604th Graves Registration Unit for reburial in the National Cemetery of the Pacific in Hawaii (see After the Battle No. 38). William Miles, a civilian from California, now lies in Plot C, Grave 601.



A sad reminder left behind by 'R.W.' on May 10, 1943 — an unknown prisoner of the Japanese.



The sole 8-inch gun to remain in situ today — commonly called the 'Hong Kong' gun, it being said that the Japanese brought it to Wake from there.

island battle itself, while American losses during the sixteen days that Wake resisted are put at 49 Marines (including 33 from VMF-211), 13 navy personnel, 37 civilian contractors, and 10 Pan American employees. Somewhere around 1,600 Americans were captured. They were evacuated in stages during 1942 until just 98 civilians remained. They were impressed to help the Japanese construct new defences as the new owners fortified the islands against any future attempt by the Americans to take them back.

Although the islands suffered many bombing and shelling attacks during the next four years, the Americans never attempted an invasion, preferring to exert a blockade which, as the war progressed, became a stranglehold. The Japanese garrison, which at one stage totalled 4,100 men, were forced to exist on rats, birds and their eggs, vegetation or whatever they could fish from the sea or grow in the sandy 'soil'. Altogether it is estimated around 1,300 men died from starvation and a further 600 from the American bombardments. Bypassed in the island-hopping campaign, it virtually withered on the vine until it surrendered peaceably on September 4, 1945.

Inquiries were then made about the 98 American civilians who could not be accounted for in the evacuation and the Japanese explanation was that some had been killed in a shelter which had received a direct hit on October 6, 1943 while the remainder, who, during the confusion, had taken the opportunity to kill their guard and put up a fight, were all annihilated when they refused to surrender. This plausible explanation was subjected to further questioning whereupon suspicion fell upon the Japanese commander, Rear Admiral Shigematsu Sakaibara, and fifteen of his men who were shipped to

Kwajalein on November 5, 1945 for trial. En route the two men who had incriminated the others committed suicide and another, Lieutenant Commander Torashi Ito, took his own life while in prison leaving behind a signed statement. When confronted with this, the Rear Admiral confessed that the story was a fabrication and that he had in fact ordered the execution of all the men. They had been marched from their barracks on the north-east tip of Wake and across the road to the north shore. There they were bound hand and foot, blindfolded and made to stand facing the ocean whereupon three platoons of Japanese soldiers shot them in the back with rifle and machine gun fire. The bodies were buried under rough coral rubble on the same spot.

Almost two years later, when the executioners learned that the island would have to be surrendered, the bodies were roughly exhumed and reburied in a mass grave in the American cemetery which had been established east of the E-W runway. There in 1946 an investigation team uncovered a mixed collection of bones forever incapable of being separated to form the identifiable skeletons of individual men. Many weeks were spent trying to piece together data for possible identification but with little success. As many as possible of the principal bones were gathered together to form a 'body', resulting in 72 separate burials in a new cemetery. (Rear Admiral Sakaibara and his adjutant, Lieutenant Commander Soichi Tachibana, were both executed for the crime.)

In 1947 the US Navy designated the Federal Aviation Administration to exercise responsibility for control of Wake. The airfield was ideally placed to play its part in the Korean War and it was the venue for the historic meeting between President Truman

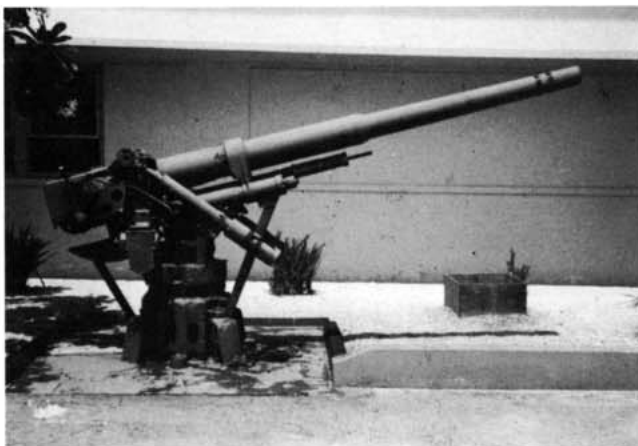
and General McArthur in 1950. A new transpacific cable laid in 1964 provided a modern telephone link with mainland United States. In 1957 Japan Air Lines erected a memorial to the Japanese dead and in 1966 the Marine Memorial and a 200-seat chapel were dedicated nearby to those who had died on Wake during the Second World War.

Wake Island is a good example of the difficulty one has in presenting some stories in After the Battle. There is an almost complete lack of contemporary photographs — presumably if any were taken by the Americans in 1941 they did not survive the ensuing four years. Secondly the islands have changed so drastically that even if they had existed, identifying the locations to match them with present-day shots would be well-nigh impossible.

Bill Oliver, long time resident on Wake, explained the problems to me in a letter in 1982:

'I've shown those two WWII photos you sent to those around the island but no one seems to be able to pinpoint where they may have been taken. To complicate matters the island's shoreline and surface features have been greatly altered by both natural and man-made changes.

'One of these events was typhoon "OLIVE" which devastated the island with 180 mph winds on September 16, 1952. Although I wasn't here to experience that particular storm myself, the stories that I have heard and the photos that I've seen depict total destruction on the island. From my own personal knowledge I can tell you of the storm "NADINE" which struck us on January 12, 1978 and piled two to three feet of coral rubble and sand on the remaining 2,500 feet of the runway which is nearest to the pier area.



Two 3-inch M3 guns remain — one set up outside the terminal building, the other minus barrel in the undergrowth on Wilkes Islet.



Left: Remains of a Japanese soldier unearthed during the construction of a seawall. Right: The Japanese memorial with its Shinto Torii gate.

"NADINE" also heaped coral boulders onto the runway. One of these boulders was six feet high. This same storm lifted a fuel tank weighing nearly fifty tons and flung it eighty-five feet after wresting it from its foundation.

On March 15 and 16, 1981 typhoon "FREDA" changed the whole southern coastline of the island. "FREDA" took out \$7 million worth of newly installed seawall and roadways on the south side of the island in two hours. At one point during this storm, water was coursing over the runway in a stream three feet deep. Only 2,500 feet of our 9,860-foot-long runway was usable after "FREDA". Needless to say there is no trace of any type of wooden pier either on the south side of the island or on the inner lagoon after all of this storm activity.

The erosion of the sediment inside the lagoon by the action of the tides has been an instrument of change for the surface of the island also. We've lost three holes of our nine-hole golf course to the waters of the lagoon by this process. A good deal of the area in which the old American cemetery is said to have been is now under water.

The defenders of Wake Island who fought here from December 8-23, 1941 keep in touch with each other through their newsletter "Wake Island Wig-Wag". The Japanese have also a Wake Veteran's Association. A party of twenty Japanese, about a dozen of whom were veterans of Wake Island, visited us from April 21 to 24, 1981.

On February 22, 1978 the graves registration department of the Japanese government sent a group of about forty Japanese to Wake to unearth and cremate the remains of those Japanese soldiers which were buried on the island. The ashes of these human remains were taken back to Japan. About a dozen of those in this party were also veterans of Wake Island as I remember. One of these gentlemen was the paymaster officer. This group unearthed and cremated the remains of about 900 Japanese soldiers from the old Japanese graveyard on Wake Islet itself. However, they were unable to locate an additional 600 graves on Peale Islet due to a lack of sufficiently accurate site survey datum and the heavy cover of brush. This group left Wake on March 8, 1978.

As a note of interest, in 1967 or 1968 a US Army Chemical Warfare team from Schofield Barracks in Hawaii came to Wake to help identify an irritant that was detected on Peale Islet. That irritant turned out to be Chloropicrin, "vomiting gas". This was the first time that it became known that the Japanese (?) had stored such a gas on Wake Island. The gas canisters apparently had been dumped into the ocean on the north side of Peale Islet sometime during the war and had

finally begun to leak their contents after all those years under water.

The trappings of war are still very much evident on Wake. We still find plenty of live bombs and ammunition. On rare occasions we will uncover an unmarked mass grave while bulldozing. Sometimes we discover underground structures that the Japanese built during the war. We have found an armoury, a hospital and a machine shop exactly as they were the day the Japanese blasted the entrances shut. Some of the equipment was still in preservative jelly I've been told. The machine shop was found by a bulldozer operator when his machine crashed through its roof and landed amidst the machinery. And of course the Japanese soldier who, legend has it, was beheaded for stealing from the supply of rations here during the war is still seen wandering about the island on dark nights carrying his head under his arm by quite a few sober individuals.

About 80 per cent of Wake Island is unrecognisable even to those Japanese who were here during the war. Too many landmarks have been removed. Overzealous bulldozing, building construction, seastorms and typhoons have all been contributing causes of change. I'm afraid that those old photos you sent were taken in those areas so changed since the war. I suspect that you would have the same problem if you were to try to do a story on the battle at Kwajalein in the Marshall Islands.

The fact is that absolutely no structures from those days survive. The only outward evidence of the battle lies in one gun which has always been known as the "Hong Kong" gun, one or two damaged blockhouses and a rock

on which some American PoWs have carved an inscription. In addition, there remains what is left of the Pan American Airways passenger-ramp from pre-war days when their flying boats used to refuel and overnight here on their transpacific flights.

Much of the same sort of activity is going on now, even though the density of air traffic is greatly diminished owing to the increased range of modern aircraft which enables many to "overfly" this refuelling stop. However, it is an undeniable fact that a cruising speed of 500 mph at 40,000 feet does not make Wake Island any larger or the Pacific Ocean any smaller so the need for an emergency airfield in this area still brings in the "Big Ones" from time to time.

There are very few of us on the island now, about twenty Americans and a work-force of 150 Filipinos, compared with the 3,000 people who were on the island twenty years ago when PAN AM and the Federal Aviation Administration were here in force with dependant relatives, and the 4,000 Vietnamese refugees who were housed here after the fall of Saigon when they were waiting for new homes in the USA.

I have worked here on and off since 1951 and my total 'Wake Island Time' amounts to about sixteen years. I am what the Americans rather grandiloquently refer to as a "Flight Operations Specialist", which simply means that I spend most of my working hours in guarding the emergency radio frequencies. I am an Englishman, born and bred, and should you ask me what I am doing so far away from home, I would have to reply: "That is a question that I am constantly asking myself!"



The US Marine Corps erected this memorial to the defenders of Wake.

**AFTER THE
BATTLE**

IT HAPPENED HERE

DISASTER AT ANTWERP

APRIL 5, 1943

BY ACHIEL RELY

FORT 3

DEURNE AIRFIELD

FORT 4

1st BOMBARDMENT
WING FORTRESS

A.P.

ERLA WORKS

FORT 5

Field Order: No. 140 Target: ANTWERP Date: 5.4.43

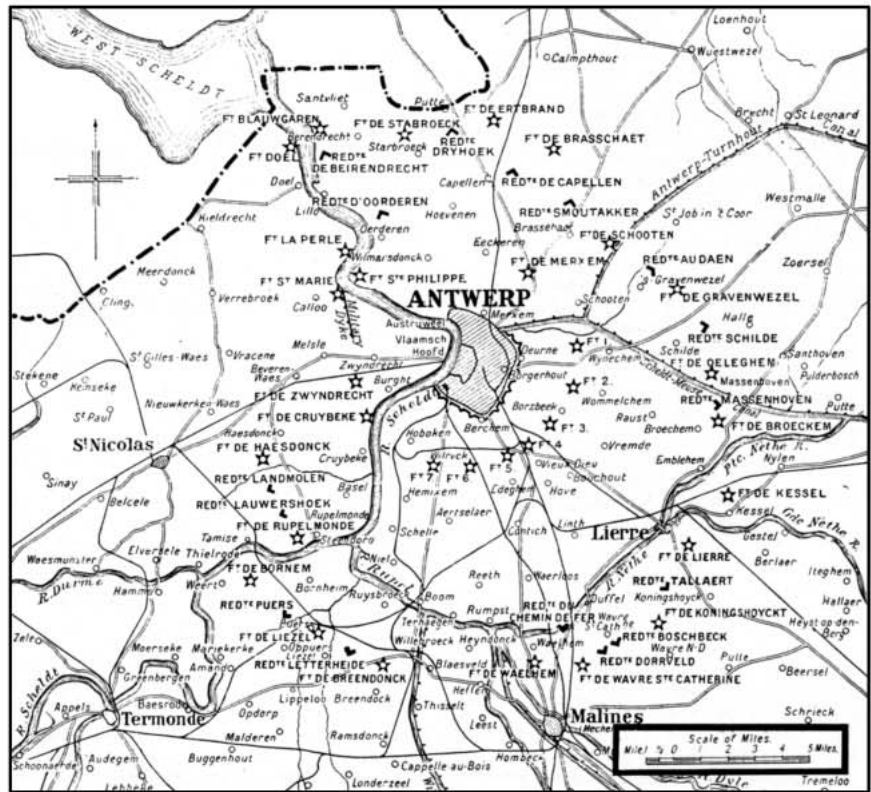
On March 1, 1935 the resurgent German Air Force shed its mantle of thinly-disguised secrecy and the 'high-speed mailplanes' and 'sporting monoplanes' of former years were unveiled in their true colours: the bombers and fighters of the new Luftwaffe. Foremost of the designs was the Messerschmitt 109 which first flew in September that year — an outstanding fighter of which 33,675 were eventually to be built by 1945.

Aircraft designs for the Luftwaffe were one thing: manufacturing capability to mass produce them was something entirely different. Investment funds were made available by the Reichsluftfahrtministerium (RLM) and a special Bank für Luftfahrt set up. However despite a massive expansion programme, Messerschmitt were still unable to produce enough of the new fighters and several other manufacturers were authorised to produce the aircraft under licence. One such concern was the ERLA-Maschinenwerke (ERLA being the German abbreviation of Ersatz Lager meaning replacement plant) at Heiterblick just outside Leipzig, and at the height of the war it comprised some 5 assembly plants, 18 dispersed factories and 13 component works.

Once war had begun, an important facet of the aviation industry was to repair and overhaul as many damaged aircraft as could reliably be returned to the battlefield. This work demanded additional manufacturing capacity and forward plants were obviously more desirable to ease the burden of transporting aircraft back to Germany. When Belgium was overrun in 1940, ERLA sent Fritz Bartsch to take over the former Minerva car factory at Antwerp for conversion to ERLA plant VII.

Minerva was to the Belgian automobile industry what Rolls-Royce, Hispano-Suiza, Maybach, Isotta Fraschini or Cadillac were to other motorised nations. Minerva's success was mostly the result of its inspired founder, Sylvain de Jong, a Dutchman who established himself in Belgium in the 1880s trading in British bicycles. In 1897, after studying the manufacturing trade in England and America, he formed a company in Antwerp to produce the new 'Minerva' bicycle, it not being long before motorised versions were developed — the 'motorbike' then finding instant success with the public. Some 3,000 were made in 1906 and by 1914 de Jong had branched out into producing motor cars.

When Antwerp was captured by German forces in 1914, the Karel Oomsstraat works became a repair depot for army vehicles. After the war, once back in the hands of Sylvain de Jong, he announced the production of the



Antwerp, with its elaborate series of forts (seen here circa 1914) which had been developed by General Henri Brialmont during the latter half of the nineteenth century, was considered the bastion of Belgium. The inner ring, spaced roughly 2,200 yards apart and some 3,500 yards from the centre of the city, had been constructed prior to 1869. Ten years later work began on the outer line of fortifications which was only completed in November 1913. Less than a year later Europe was at war but 'Fortress Antwerp' was deemed impregnable. However the range of the then-modern German 28cm howitzer soon put paid to that theory and on October 8 the city fell. Prominent amongst the defences which put up a spirited resistance were Forts 2, 3, 4 and 5. Twenty-eight years later this was the precise area to suffer one of the major tragedies of the Second World War.

luxury 'Sans Soupapes' automobile — a status symbol which found fame with film stars and politicians alike. The trademark which adorned every radiator was the Goddess of Wisdom: Minerva.

In 1922 a new modern factory was opened in the suburb of Mortsel and within three years more than fifty cars were being produced each week. Most went for export and Minervas won many international motor

races. Sylvain de Jong died in 1928 and with the death of 'le grand patron' came the beginning of the end of an era. At that time the company had nearly 7,000 employees but the world depression reduced demand for its products and, although Minerva fought hard to survive, by 1934 it was bankrupt. The Imperia group took over the remaining assets for a period until Fritz Bartsch arrived with new German management in May 1940.



The Minerva/ERLA VII plant on Vredebaan in 1983. The left-hand building was used for administration and officers' quarters.

Conveniently situated near Deurne/Antwerp aerodrome, the Minerva buildings were re-equipped, new offices constructed and in the summer of that year the first Bf 109s arrived for repair by road. When aircraft arrived at ERLA VII, in addition to repairing damaged bodywork and engines, an opportunity was taken to incorporate the latest modifications. Thereafter machines were taken by lorry to the airfield to be test flown by ERLA's pilots and, after being approved and checked by officials of the RLM, Luftwaffe ferry pilots delivered them to their assigned units. By 1943, some 3,000 people worked at the factory with 400 more at the airfield. Most were Belgians who considered themselves lucky not to have been deported to work in Germany. Plans were underway to carry out the same repair work for the Focke-Wulf 190 and to introduce round-the-clock working in three shifts.

The importance of the factory to the Axis war effort had been notified to London by local resistance agents 'Ulysse' and 'Le Sage' of the 'Boucle' Ring, both of whom lived close by the works. With their report of March 30, 1943 they even managed to send sketch plans of the layout.

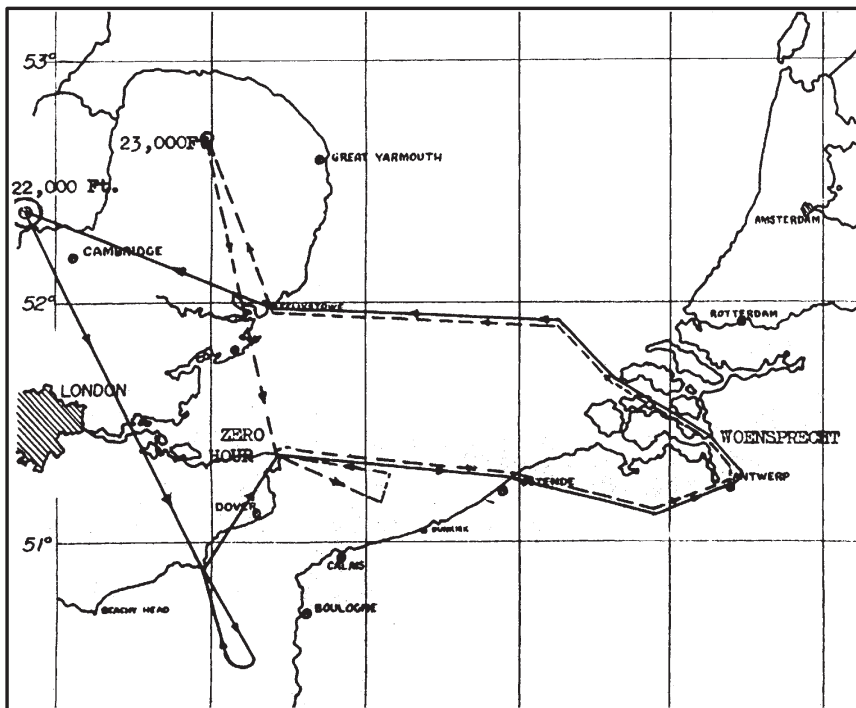
No time was lost in detailing the factory for attention and the target was assigned to the US Eighth Air Force. Command headquarters planned the raid to take place on April 5 and be carried out by two Bombardment Wings: the 1st comprising the 91st, 303rd, 305th and 306th Bombardment Groups flying Fortresses, and the 44th and 93rd Bomb Groups with Liberators from the 2nd Bombardment Wing.

The day turned out fine with excellent visibility with just a thin misty cloud cover at 30,000 feet. Two diversionary feints were planned to attempt to mask the true destination of the bombers. The first, consisting of 25 Liberators, covered by Spitfires of Nos. 310 and 313 Squadrons from No. 10 Group, RAF, would fly out across the Channel from North Foreland to a point 25 miles north-west of Dunkirk, then to a position 20 miles north-east of the town before returning to North Foreland. The second diversion of 79 Fortresses, escorted by the Spitfires of the Kenley Wing, Nos. 411 and 421 Squadrons, RAF, would sweep from Dungeness midway across to France at a point 25 miles north-west of Le Tréport, then back to North Foreland whereupon both diversionary groups would then join in the main attack.

The main force was to be led by the 306th Bomb Group followed in order by the 91st, 303rd and 305th — a total of 79 B-17s — with the 44th and 93rd following on with 25 B-24s. Royal Air Force squadrons were to provide Spitfire IXs for escort: the first from the Kenley Wing (Nos. 403 and 416 Squadrons) to be followed by the Northolt Wing (Nos. 315 and 316) with top cover by No. 611 Squadron from Biggin Hill. The Hornchurch Wing (Nos. 453 and 122 Squadrons) would escort the first phase of the withdrawal, handing over for the second part to Nos. 331 and 332 of the North Weald Wing. The RAF listed the operation as Ramrod No. 52.

The 306th took off on time and met the 91st Bomb Group as planned over Bassingbourn while the 303rd was joining the 305th over Chelveston. However not enough time had been allowed for the aircraft of the 44th and 93rd of the 2nd Bombardment Wing to join the leaders and, as a result, turns on the diversionary sweep had to be cut short in order to catch up.

No enemy aircraft were encountered on this part of the operation but German fighters were already positioning themselves to meet the main threat. On the northern flank one Staffel scrambled from Woensdrecht, one from Gilze-Rijen, two from Soesterberg and two from Schiphol, while two fighter wings in the Pas de Calais were vectored to Dunkirk

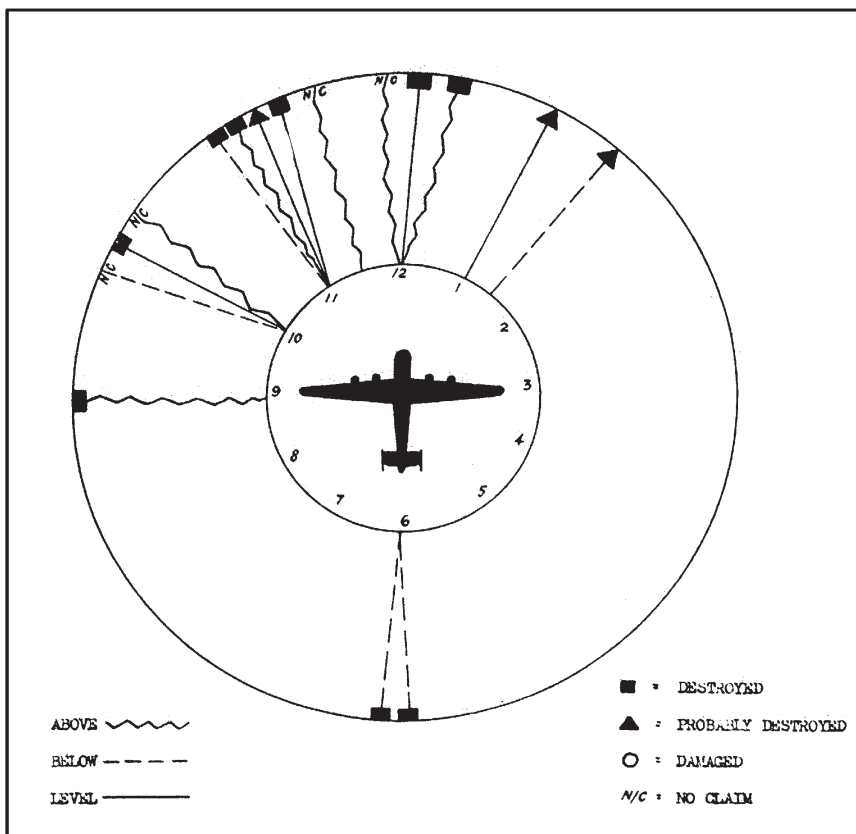


The assigned routes for the First Wing (solid line) and Second Wing (dotted). The diversionary feints were included to try to disguise the real target and divert the German fighters. (From the Tactical Mission Report, HQ VIII Bomber Command.)

where they intercepted the bombers soon after landfall. There the St Omer Wing went in to attack the leading formation while the Vitry Wing concentrated on the fighter escort.

The Spitfires of the Kenley Wing had arrived north of Ostend at 25,000 feet at 3.15 p.m. where they orbited down sun and above the leading box of bombers. Shortly afterwards about 30+ FW 190s were seen

getting in position up sun preparing to attack. No. 416 Squadron engaged the German aircraft as they came down to attack the bombers from directly ahead, both above and below in singles, twos, fours and sixes. A running fight developed as the Fortresses pressed on towards Antwerp. Already eleven aircraft had aborted from the four groups in the lead for various mechanical and personnel



Illustrative of the detail with which mission reports were compiled, this diagram shows the direction of enemy aircraft attacks on the formation.

failures, and the Liberators of 2nd Wing (the 44th and 93rd BGs), which had assembled over Shipdam, had failed to catch them up, and they crossed the Channel some fifteen miles behind the 1st Wing.

The Kenley Spitfires had to break off at 3.35 p.m. but they had already been joined by the Northolt Wing which had reached the last box of Fortresses at 2.48 p.m. while No. 611 Squadron was up at 28,000 feet on high cover. Reaching the limit of fighter endurance, the 306th in the lead lost their Spitfire protection over Ghent whereupon they met, in the words of the official report, 'the strongest and most aggressive force of fighters that the First Bombardment Wing has ever faced. The enemy with his tactics of attacking in formation, picking out the low aircraft, boring in to make the attack and then breaking away downward as the next wave came in, was successful in destroying four aircraft and acting as a definite deterrent on the bombing run.' Several crews reported that the Germans tried to bomb them and all four B-17s lost on this operation were 306th machines.

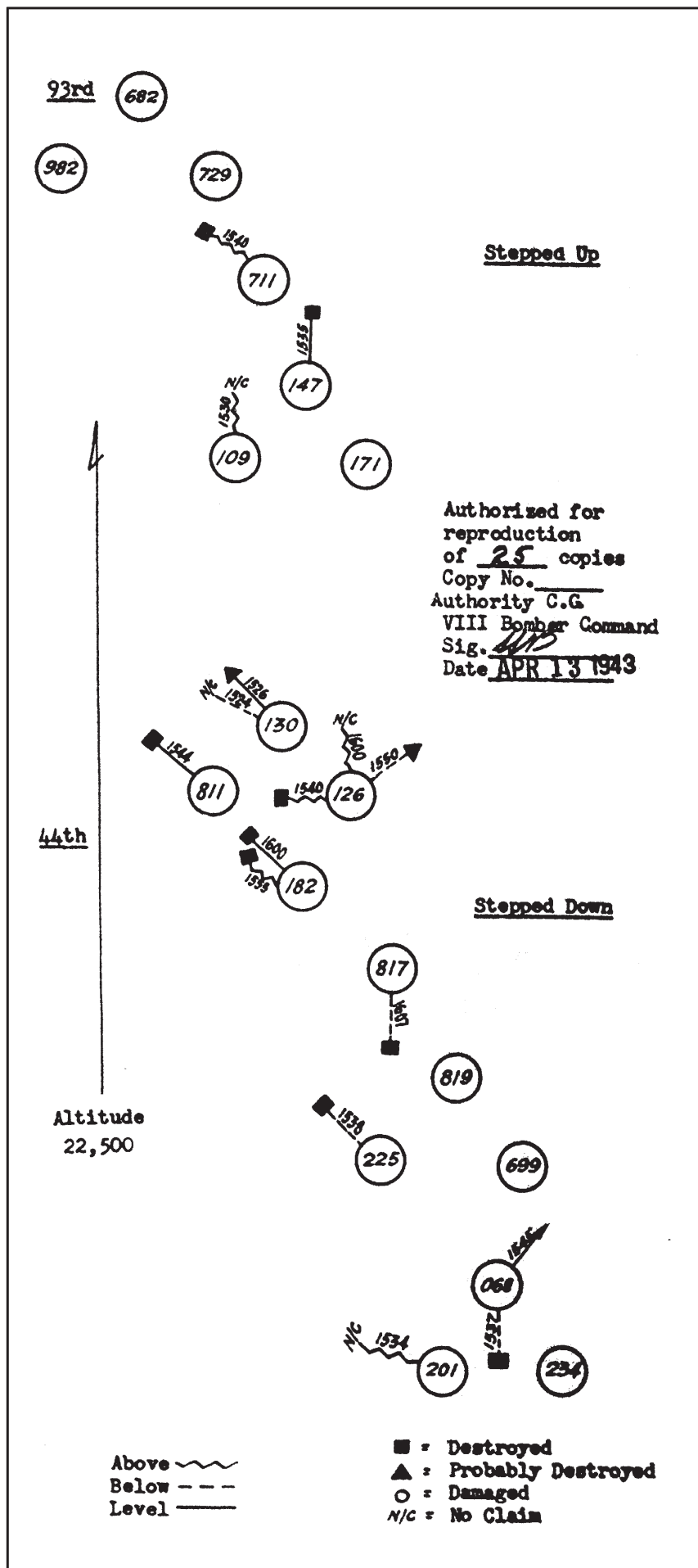
The group leader for the day was Lieutenant Colonel J. W. Wilson and he had Brigadier General Frank A. Armstrong, Jr., former 306th commander and now deputy commander of the 1st Bombardment Wing, on board as an observer. The four aircraft that went down were those of Lieutenants Clarence Fischer, Robert J. Seelos, Kelly Ross, and William H. Parker. The 306th history *First over Germany* describes what happened:

'Lt. Fischer's 367th [Bomb Squadron] plane, *L'il Abner*, was hit over Ghent on the way in, falling out of formation where it became easy prey to fighters. The Luftwaffe finished it off in three or four quick passes. After bailing out, the crew saw their plane explode before it hit the ground. Landing in and around a factory, members of the crew were quickly gathered up by the Germans, although Fischer had had sufficient time to acquire and put on civilian clothing. Others on his crew that day were Lt. James Crouch, co-pilot; Lt. Joseph Consolmagno, navigator; Lt. William A. Moses, bombardier; T/Sgt. Francis L. Eastham; S/Sgts. Henry B. Compton, Walter R. Kuczynski, Norris R. Phifer and Lee Sanders and Sgt. William C. Rhodes.

'Lt. Seelos says the group was flying an experimental, staggered up formation that day and that his plane became a sitting duck when it lost an outboard engine when flak ripped through a propellor blade. Unable to feather the engine, he was forced to drop out of formation and then lost the other outboard. Fighters finished off the plane and the crew went out. Sgt. Roland Magee was hit in the eye by flak. Lt. James E. Murray, T/Sgt. Stanley Stemkoski and T/Sgt. Fred R. Hampton were killed in the plane. Captured quickly and imprisoned were Seelos, Magee, Lt. William W. Saunders and T/Sgt. William H. Kesky and S/Sgt. Raymond Walls.

'After bailing out, Seelos landed in a street in Wustwezel [fifteen miles north of Mortsel], met a pretty blond and, as he was quickly being marched away by German soldiers, managed to slip his escape kit to the girl.

'Landing in the next street was Lt. Alexander Kramarinko, the co-pilot. He soon located S/Sgt. William E. Baker and with quick civilian assistance the two were on the high road to Paris. "The British had told us," relates Kramarinko, "that the best way to get into the right hands in Paris was to locate a prostitute. We tried it, but when the girls found we were Americans they left in a hurry and we were no closer to the Resistance than before." Luck was with Kramarinko and Baker and they were soon on a Paris-Bordeaux express, arriving at that southwestern harbor after eleven hours. Then the pair headed for the Pyrenees and, in less than ten days after being shot down, were well on their way to freedom.



Bombs away! One thousand pounders from the Liberators rain down on Mortsel. The factory is out of the picture to the top; the fort directly beneath the bombs is No. 6 with No. 7 lower down — the bomb plot indicates the error.

'Tackling the Pyrenees at any season was a job for a seasoned hiker; and the American airmen found the struggle through the ascending hills and valleys into snow and cold forbidding and almost impossible. Struggling on, the pair finally crossed the Spanish border. Soon they found a hut and collapsed inside out of the biting winds, only to be awakened shortly by German soldiers. It developed that the two had gone six kilometers over the border before stopping, not knowing that a German-Spanish treaty permitted the Germans to seek and arrest errant airman ten kilometers into Spain. Thus, the successful escape and evasion saga came to a quick and sorry end; the two men were in German prison camps for the remainder of the war.

'Shot down over the ERLA works was Lt. Kelly Ross' 367th plane. Becoming prisoners with Ross were Lts. George Lewis and Sidney Miller, and Sgts. Earl Benson, William Hovekamp, Clyde Smith and Douglas Bowles.



SECRET

GROUP BOMBING PLOT AND REPORT

W.D. A.C.
Form 12. C
Modified for Combat.

GROUP 91, 305, 305, 306

TARGET ERLA WORKS - ANTWERP

METHOD OF BOMBING PATTERN

ALTITUDE 24,26000

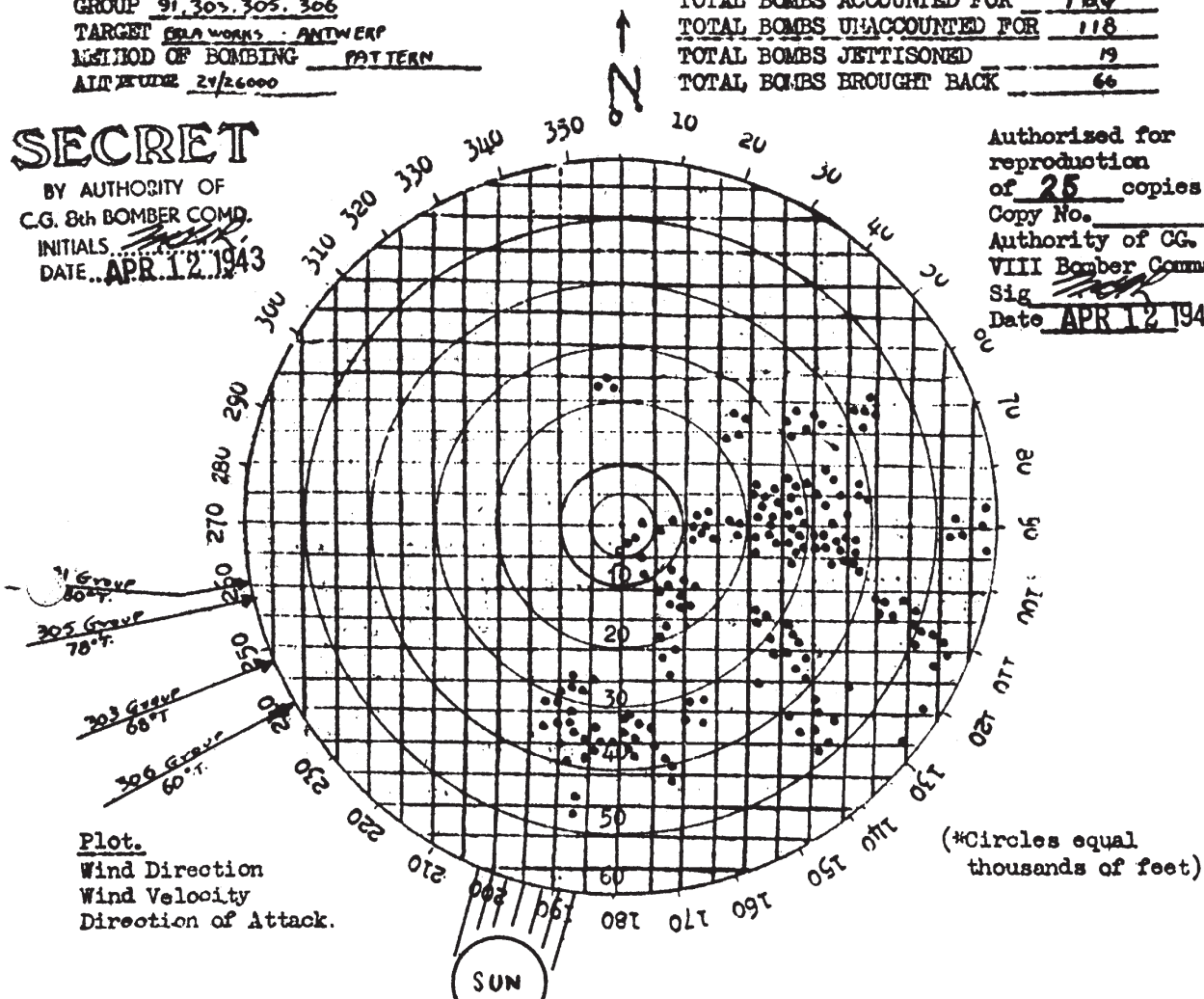
TOTAL BOMBS CARRIED	<u>474</u>	<u>41000</u>
TOTAL BOMBS AT TARGET	<u>383</u>	
TOTAL BOMBS HITTING TARGET	<u>3</u>	
TOTAL BOMBS ACCOUNTED FOR	<u>180</u>	
TOTAL BOMBS UNACCOUNTED FOR	<u>118</u>	
TOTAL BOMBS JETTISONED	<u>19</u>	
TOTAL BOMBS BROUGHT BACK	<u>66</u>	

SECRET

BY AUTHORITY OF
C.G. 8th Bomber Comd.

INITIALS [Signature]
DATE APR 12 1943

Authorized for
reproduction
of 25 copies
Copy No. [Number]
Authority of CG.
VIII Bomber Command
Sig [Signature]
Date APR 12 1943



Plot.
Wind Direction
Wind Velocity
Direction of Attack.

T/Sgt. Arnold E. Hyman and S/Sgt. Arthur Byrd, tail gunner and waist gunner, did not survive. Hyman was first out of the plane. Bowles, from the radio room, had helped him fasten the chest strap over his heavy leather flying suit. It is suspected that Hyman may have forgotten to fasten the leg straps of his parachute. Ross was wounded on the right side of his head and shoulder and the fragments later removed proved to be from .50 caliber ammunition. Bowles suffered a wound at the base of the spine, from either flak or gunfire, and was hospitalized in Antwerp for two weeks before being moved on to prison camp. The pilot had ordered the bailout after the number 2 engine was shot out, the left wing badly damaged and most of the flight controls rendered inoperative.

The fourth 367th plane down on this mission was that of 1st Lt. William H. Parker, with only three survivors out of the crew: Lt. Charles Thelen, co-pilot; Lt. Arthur Milbourn, navigator; and T/Sgt. Leonard O'Brien, tail gunner. Flying as a squadron lead, Parker's plane was hit hard by fighters and, although under control, began to drift away from the formation. Then Parker, Thelen and Milbourn bailed out. Tail gunner Leonard O'Brien relates that when he heard the bailout signal he was busy shooting down an attacking aircraft; and with that accomplished he headed forward to see what was going on. He passed the two waist gunners, both dead, and the radio operator who was standing in the middle of the radio room. When O'Brien got through the bomb bay and top turret to the flight deck he found Engineer John Creatore in the pilot's seat and navigator Paul Spaduzzi in the co-pilot's position.

O'Brien asked what they were doing and they told him they were going to fly the plane into France and crash-land it. O'Brien suggested that they head for the Channel and try to ditch the plane there. Spaduzzi called for a 270 degree heading and, as Creatore started to turn the plane, it did a full roll and went into a spin. The nose had been heavily damaged earlier and Spaduzzi's parachute had been popped by the force of the explosion. O'Brien forced his way out of the nose hatch and pulled his rip cord; he landed about



Taken seconds after the shot on page 42, the raid has developed bringing death and destruction to the Oude God area of Mortsel. The municipal square is covered by bomb-bursts yet the factory is virtually unscathed. (US Air Force)





Difficult indeed it must have been for the peoples of the occupied countries to keep faith with the ultimate Allied victory . . .





. . . when mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, homes and schools were swept away — not by the invader but by friends.





seventy-five yards away from the spot where the plane crashed and burned.

'After nearly drowning in a canal, O'Brien was first rescued by Belgian farmers and then taken captive by German soldiers. Before being imprisoned his truck stopped to pick up the body of the pilot, Parker. Other crew members who died were waist gunners Richard E. Haeft and Sidney E. Davis, radio operator James E. Gross and ball turret gunner James S. Clark.

'Action in the lead ship was frantic as the German fighters pressed their head-on attacks. A 20mm cannon shell exploded in the nose against a can of .50 caliber ammunition. It was these smaller cartridges that tore into the leg of Lt. Salitnik. Although critically wounded, the group navigator gave Col. Wilson a heading off the target for home before lapsing into unconsciousness. Regan also was wounded, but he and Engineer John Crowther were able to extinguish a hydraulic fluid fire in the cockpit. The lead ship's oxygen system and radios were shot away. In addition, the flight controls had been damaged by the fierce attacks.

'Upon landing at Thurleigh, Salitnik received four pints of plasma in the plane, administered by 1st Lt. Samuel D. Simpson, 423rd Squadron surgeon. The critically wounded man was further treated at the dispensary on the base and then taken to the hospital at Diddington. He responded well, was out of shock the following day, but developed gas gangrene on 15 April and died the next day. Of that mission Col. Putnam [Group CO] said that the death of Salitnik was "the greatest loss to the fighting power of the group" that they could have had.

'Gen. Armstrong was later to receive the Distinguished Service Cross for his part. Although the citation states that Armstrong was flying the plane, he never touched the controls. But after Salitnik was wounded Armstrong did administer first aid to him as he shared a walk-around oxygen bottle with Capt. Regan.'

Due to the violent evasive action necessary, the bombing run was poor and as the lead

On that Monday afternoon, Achiel Rely's grandmother and aunt came out of a bakery near here. They wanted to go to Edegem, a nearby village, but as the weather was fine decided to walk instead of taking public transport. They survived . . . thirty people on the bus they would have taken did not.



bombardier sighted for range and deflection, he released his bombs late and they landed beyond the target. Fourteen other aircraft dropped their loads of 1,000 lb General-Purpose bombs on the leading bursts.

The 91st Group began their bombing run when they saw the 306th go in, only to see the latter turn off the heading and then back on to it again. This caused the 91st to come in on a different heading and their bombs dropped close to those of the 306th's rear aircraft. Then in came the 303rd. On their bombing run the bombsight went out of commission in the leading aircraft and caused a delay in release of four to six seconds, with all aircraft bombing on the lead aircraft.

So far few bombs had hit the target, the majority of the sticks straddling the residential suburb of Mortsel with some bombs dropping over a mile from the factory. Fifteen miles to the rear, the 2nd Bombardment Wing reached a target covered in smoke. The leading group, the 93rd, sighted individually and all dropped their bombs at the same time. The 44th followed a few seconds later, dropping on the deputy leader as the bombsight in the leading Liberator had frosted up.

Five miles beneath the bombers was an indescribable scene of carnage and destruction. The air raid siren had given a warning of an impending attack shortly after



Accounts differ as to the number of schoolchildren killed: from 193 to 209. Desks remain neatly rowed up on an upper floor as

rescuers toil below. (Original pictures courtesy of the Research and Study Centre for the Second World War in Brussels.)

3.00 p.m. when the track of the main force was predicted as crossing the city. The six AA batteries of Flak Abteilung 295 dispersed around Antwerp were brought to readiness and at 3.24 p.m. Flakuntergruppe Antwerpen reported the first aircraft in sight. One of the B-17s was brought down by flak, the other three 306th machines being shot down by Oberleutnant Glunz, Oberleutnant Stammberger and Major 'Pips' Priller. Hauptmann Fritz Geishardt, fighter ace with 102 victories and Kommandeur of III/JG26 was severely wounded during the battle and crash-landed at Ghent. He died from his injuries the following day.

Confirmed kills were awarded to Tech. Sergeant Louis J. Enloe and Staff Sergeant William G. Hicks of the 367th Bomb Squadron, Tech. Sergeant Edward H. Small of the 368th, and Staff Sergeants George J. McClellan and James J. Garris of the 423rd.

The inaccuracy in the bombing led to the deaths of 936 civilians in Mortsels including 209 school children — Guido Gezelle School in the Eggestraat, St Vincentius School in the Edegemstraat and St Ludgardis School on the Mechelsesteenweg were all badly hit. Another 1,342 people were injured. Some 220 private dwellings were destroyed, another 609 houses severely damaged with 3,136 properties suffering to a lesser degree.

Civilian casualties caused in attacks on Germany itself (Essen had just received three devastating raids by the RAF) was one thing but deaths due to bombing targets in the occupied countries worked directly against the Allied cause. The well-known Flemish newspaper *De Dag* (published under German censorship) headlined the attack 'Anglo Saxon terror bombing' and proclaimed it as 'England's latest crime'. The Belgian ambassador to the USA protested about the inaccuracies of the bombing and Dr Goebbles' propaganda machine took full advantage of the disaster to take violent issue with the Allies over the conduct of warfare in the air. Marshal Pétain, leader of Vichy France, called the Allied raids unjustifiable while in Japan the same month captured American airmen were court-martialled and executed for taking part in a bombing attack on Tokyo.

Dr Goebbles wrote in his diary on April 11: 'An imposing funeral has been arranged by the local authorities for the victims of an American bomb attack on Antwerp. The English and Americans have so far taken no notice whatever of our propaganda about Antwerp. That is proof of their bad conscience. It supports our idea of making a first-class propaganda matter of the Antwerp incident.'

With the whole of Antwerp in mourning, a

symbolic funeral ceremony was celebrated in the Onze Lieve Vrouw Cathedral where ten coffins containing unidentified victims stood before the altar. Mass was celebrated by Cardinal Ernest van Roey in the presence of Count Cornet de Ways Ruart representing King Leopold III (then held under house arrest by the Germans at the royal château outside Brussels) and Count de Henricourt de Grunne on behalf of Queen Elizabeth of Belgium (Leopold's mother whose husband, Albert I, had died in February 1934); Leo Delwaide, the Burgomaster for Antwerp, and Frans Wildiers, the ad interim Governor of Antwerp and Brabant. Generalleutnant Freiherr von Hammerstein represented General von Falkenhausen, military commander for occupied Belgium and northern France, and he was accompanied by General Metzner of the Luftwaffe and other high ranking German officers including Generalmajor Schmidt of the Feldkommandatur Antwerpen. Dr Seyffert represented President Reeder. Others present were Ir. van Thillo, leader of the Vrijwillige Arbeidsdienst (Voluntary Labour Service) and Dr Hendrik Elias, leader of the Vlaams Nationaal Verbond (Flemish National Union), the Burgomasters of Brussels, Ghent and Liege together with the many delegates from surrounding municipalities.



Perhaps the most difficult ordeal of all was the identification of the casualties. The coffins of ten unidentified victims were

taken to the Onze Lieve Vrouw Cathedral for the funeral service as representative of all those killed.



Once the service was over the ten coffins were taken to the municipal square in Mortsel, already filled with dozens of hearses and ordinary trucks bearing the coffins of the casualties. Thousands of relatives and friends packed the square and side streets. Cardinal van Roey, walking between the rows of vehicles, administered the last rites individually to each victim as the choir sang *In Paradisum*. No bells tolled in mourning (the church lay partly in ruins) as the interment took place in a special Park of Honour created in the cemetery of Mortsel-Dorp. (Some relatives chose burial in private graves in the other Mortsel cemetery of Oude God.)

A few days later Queen Elizabeth visited Mortsel accompanied by the Burgomaster and acting police commander and saw the destroyed schools and many wounded in hospitals throughout the city.

The Boucle network reported the details of the raid to London on April 20. The houses of the two local agents, Ulysse and Le Sage, had both been destroyed although neither was hurt. Stating that 802 (sic) people had been killed, the ring requested that any future attacks be carried out by low flying Mosquito aircraft.

Analysis of the aerial reconnaissance photographs, taken by both the USAAF during the raid and by No. 541 Squadron, RAF, on April 17, clearly indicated the bombing error with little significant damage to the ERLA factory. Repairs to the latter were quickly carried out and production was back to normal within a few weeks.

No further attack was made against the



While the symbolic ten were borne by horse-drawn hearses, every conceivable lorry and truck had been pressed into service in the Gemeente Plein — the municipal square. The town hall building in the background had received several hits but was repaired after the war only to be demolished when a new town hall was built.



While much has changed some aspects remain as they were, making the comparison with yesterday's tragedy all the more poignant to the visitor today.



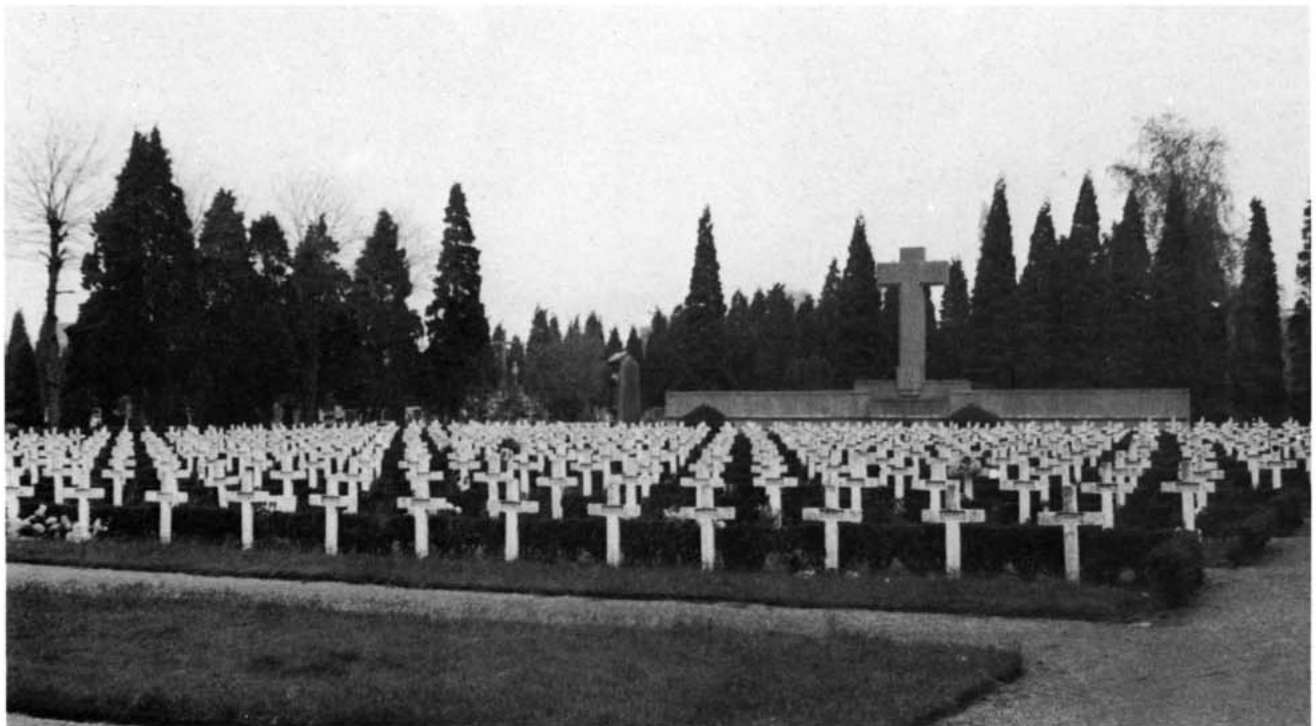


Minerva plant and when Antwerp was captured in 1944 it was taken over by British forces. From 1950 until 1953 the factory produced Land-Rovers under licence and also undertook the assembly of Rovers and Armstrong Siddeley saloons. The last vehicles manufactured there were light 4×4 trucks employing American Continental and Austrian Jenbach diesels before the plant was sold. Today the combined plant of the old ERLA factory and adjacent Daimler-Benz factory is occupied by the Agfa Gevaert Company and several other firms — the only reminder of its traumatic past being the small road nearby: Minervastraat.

'First over Germany', the wartime history of the 306th Bombardment Group by Russell A. Strong, is still in print. Copies can be obtained in England from Beaumonts Aviation Bookshop, 656 Holloway Road, London N19, price £14.25 plus postage. American readers can purchase direct from the author at 2041 Hillsdale, Kalamazoo, MI 49007, price \$20.



The factory was certainly hit and the northern end was severely damaged. Daimler-Benz engines can be seen *above* against the wall. (J. Maes)



The unanswerable question: was it worth the price? Park of Honour in Mortsel-Dorp cemetery on Pastoor Michielensstraat.



5 APRIL 1943